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Extended Family Kinship Following Divorce:
Investigating Ongoing Relationships, Social Support Resource, and Role in Family Therapy

Münevver Selenga Gürmen, PhD

University of Connecticut, 2015

Abstract

Extended family relationship and support are important protective factors for families undergo stress-inducing life events such as divorce. As families go through several readjustments and reorganizations following divorce, extended family interactions both affect and are affected by these changes. In addition, extended family members can provide support for post-divorce adjustment and relationships. Existing literature provided valuable insights regarding post-divorce extended family relationships but they were mostly conducted over 25 years ago. The field of family therapy emphasizes and encourages the inclusion of extended family members in therapy sessions. Despite the importance of extended family, there is no empirical study exploring its involvement in family therapy sessions. In order to examine current post-divorce extended family interactions and support, extended family's impact on post-divorce adjustments and co-parenting, as well as the role of extended family in family therapy, data was collected from 369 divorced individuals (66% women and 34% men) with children between the ages of 0 to 18. Hence, the current dissertation presents three manuscripts, each targeting a different aspect of literature on the extended family. The first manuscript explored contemporary post-divorce extended family relationships. It provided a snapshot of post-divorce interactions with extended family such as contact, closeness, and perceived influence. It also examined the support extended family members from one's own family and former spouse's family provide. The second

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manuscript explored the role of support that extended family provides to the families going through divorce on their post-divorce adjustment, mainly post-divorce co-parenting relationship. The study utilized the Double ABCX Family Stress model (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983) to examine the role of extended family members as a social support for post-divorce co-parenting relationship between former spouses. Lastly, the third manuscript explored how extended family members are involved in conjoint sessions of former spouses at different stages of divorce.

Extended Family Kinship Following Divorce:
Investigating Ongoing Relationships, Social Support Resource, and Role in Family Therapy

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements of the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

at the

University of Connecticut

2015

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2015

APPROVAL PAGE

Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

Extended Family Kinship Following Divorce:
Investigating Ongoing Relationships, Social Support Resource, and Role in Family Therapy

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INTRODUCTION

Merriam-Webster dictionary (2015) defines extended family as “a family that includes not only parents and children but also other relatives (such as grandparents, aunts, or uncles)”. It also includes relatives by marriage; relatives of the spouse. Family theory and family therapy emphasize extended family relationships as important for understanding, assessing, and intervening in family dynamics (Minuchin, 1974). Extended family affects and is affected by the experiences of nuclear family, as they are interdependent entities of the larger family system (Minuchin, 1974).

Extended family relationships become especially important and salient during different life stages or major life transitions of families such as divorce (Lin, Ensel, Simeone, & Kuo, 1979). Despite its importance, not much is known in regards to the role of extended family relationships after divorce in contemporary times. The current dissertation contributes to the extended family literature by exploring the contemporary patterns of post-divorce extended family relationships, the role of extended family on post-divorce adjustments and co-parenting, and direct and indirect involvement of extended family in family therapy at different stages of divorce.

Why Is Extended Family Important?

The relationship with extended family became a focus of interest in family studies and family therapy in late 1970s and 1980s. Researchers (Brown, 1982; Pattison, Defrancisco, Wood, Frazier, & Crowder, 1975; Wilson, 1986) necessitated the inclusion of exploring relationship with the extended family while studying psychosocial systems of family and family dynamics. For nearly two decades, researchers explored the importance of extended kinship, especially in relation to stressful life events and mental health problems (Dressler, 1985; Lin et al., 1979).

Extended family has been positioned as one of the important elements of social support network for individuals and families.

It is conceptualized that extended family as a social support system can play an *antecedent factor* in which existence of strong and positive extended family system can prevent or at least decrease the probability of experiencing stressful life events or illness (Lin et al., 1979). It can also play a *buffering role* when an individual or a family experiences life changing events and physical or mental illness (Lin et al., 1979). Having supportive relatives might ameliorate the experienced psychosocial stress after a stress inducing life-changing event. Social support systems, including extended family, can play a mediator or moderator role in individuals' and/or families' response to mental illness and stress (Lin et al., 1979).

Extended Family and Divorce

One of the major life transitions that families might experience is divorce. In the past, divorce was perceived as a disruption of family system; but currently, it is perceived as an alternative developmental pathway for families (Thornton, 1985). Divorce often has a negative impact on several different areas of individual and family functioning. For example, a review of the impact of divorce on children found that children's physical, emotional, and mental health, as well as their social and occupational functioning may all be negatively impacted by divorce (Amato, 2000). In addition, divorce might negatively affect adult adjustment; divorced individuals can experience psychological distress and mental health problems following divorce (Amato, 2000).

In addition to the effects of divorce on individual functioning, families going through divorce experience changes in dyadic and overall family relationship levels (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011; Emery, 2011) Divorce requires family members to restructure and readjust

boundaries and family organizations (Emery, 2011). Parent-child relationships as well as relationship between former spouses need to be redefined. In fact, co-parenting relationship between former spouses becomes the salient form of relating as the spousal relationship terminates. Conflict between former spouses, especially in co-parenting relationship, is associated with other individual and family level adjustments. For instance, conflict between co-parents might affect academic achievement and result in increased behavioral problems for children (Amato, 2000; Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). Therefore, post-divorce family therapy is often utilized to reduce stress and conflict between divorced co-parents and to help families adjust to changing circumstances and relationships (Neff & Cooper, 2004).

The experience of divorce in nuclear families does not happen in a vacuum. In addition to family members in the nuclear family, the extended kinship system affects and is affected by the nuclear family functioning following divorce (Pattison et al., 1975). In fact, the influence of extended family members to post-divorce adjustments can be very complicated (Brown, 1982).

What Do We Know So Far?

The involvement and reactions of extended kinship system may vary depending on the roles they play in the family as well as their own emotional investment in the dissolving marriage (Brown, 1982). In addition, they can play different roles in family's adjustment to changing roles and identities following divorce. Existing literature on extended family relationships following divorce has been conducted in 1970s and 1980s and focused on general divorce adjustment and changing kinship interactions (Johnson, 1987; Johnson, 1989; Spicer & Hampe, 1975).

Existing literature on post-divorce extended family relationships provide valuable insights to changes experienced by families. The studies usually look at specific areas of extended family interaction such as contact, emotional closeness, and influence of extended family members. For

instance, findings from different studies suggest that there is a decrease in contact and involvement with relatives by marriage following divorce (Ambert, 1988; Anspach, 1976). In a longitudinal study, Ambert (1988) found that the contact with former spouses' family decreases significantly immediately after separation. Additionally, following divorce, people report less emotional closeness and obligation to maintain kinship with their former in-laws (Johnson, 1989; Spicer & Hampe, 1975). The presence of children in the family tempers these effects with divorced individuals with children maintaining contact with former spouses' family more than divorced individuals without children (Ambert, 1988).

When it comes to support role of extended family, the involvement and reactions of extended family members may vary depending on the roles they play in the family as well as their own emotional investment in the dissolving marriage (Brown, 1982). The reactions of extended family members to the decision of divorce might also affect the social support they provide to divorcing children (Brown, 1982; Hamon, 1995). If extended family members experience strong negative emotions to the divorce, this can impede the immediate, initial support for divorcing parents and divorce adjustment process (Brown, 1982). On the other hand, in a qualitative study, Hamon (1995) found that parents of divorcing children usually provide advice, emotional support, and instrumental support during and after divorce. Similarly, Serovich, Price, and Chapman (1992) explored the social support that former spouses' extended family provides for divorced individuals. They found that approval of divorce made a significant positive contribution regarding the amount of contact and support that former spouses' family provided to divorced individuals (Serovich et al., 1992).

In regards to the role of extended family in family therapy, there are no empirical studies conducted to explore this issue. Pioneers in the family therapy field continuously called

therapists to directly including extended family members in therapy sessions (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973; Minuchin & Fishman, 2009; Gurman, 1981a; 1981b). Especially, in the face of stressful life events or mental health issues, extended family becomes an important source of support and a network to build for intervention (Rueveni, 1979). It is the role of the therapist to initiate discussions around current extended family relationships, to explore intergenerational patterns, utilize the potential supportive networks for the families in crises (Rueveni, 1979, Pattison et al., 1975). Intergenerational therapists have suggested inviting some influential extended family members, such as grandparents, to family therapy sessions in order to engage in different levels of systemic exchanges (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973; Rueveni, 1979). Despite the emphasis on inclusion of extended family in family therapy, to date, there is no empirical study regarding this topic.

The Current Dissertation

The current dissertation will present three manuscripts, each targeting a different aspect of the extended family. The first manuscript explored contemporary post-divorce extended family relationships. It provided a snapshot of post-divorce interactions with extended family such as contact, closeness, and perceived influence. It also examined the support extended family members from one's own family and former spouse's family provide. The second manuscript explored the role of support that extended family provides to the families going through divorce on their post-divorce adjustment, mainly post-divorce co-parenting relationship. The study utilized the Double ABCX Family Stress model (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983) to examine the role of extended family members as a social support for post-divorce co-parenting relationship between former spouses. Lastly, the third manuscript explored how extended family members are involved in conjoint sessions of former spouses at different stages of divorce.

Overall, these manuscripts contribute to the extended family and divorce literature in different and important ways. They help us to understand the position of extended family relationships in 2010s as well as their influence and support for families going through divorce. Also, the third manuscript provides important insights on how extended family can indirectly influence the process of therapy for former spouses as well as their direct involvements as either being focus of discussions or participating in sessions. From the findings of these studies, family theorists and therapists can further understand the unique ways of extended family involvement in divorced individuals' experiences and find different ways to mobilize the existing resources for families.

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Relationship with Extended Family Following Divorce:

A Closer Look at Contemporary Times

Abstract

Extended family relationships may serve as either resources or as additional stressors as families negotiate stressful life events such as divorce. As families go through several readjustments and reorganizations following divorce, extended family members both affect and are affected by these changes. Existing literature provides valuable insights regarding post-divorce extended family relationships but they were mostly conducted over 25 years ago. In order to provide up-to-date information on current post-divorce extended family relationships, the current paper examines 369 divorced individuals (66% women and 34% men) divorced individuals' post-divorce relationships with their extended family members. Participants reported on contact and closeness with their extended family members, as well as perceived influence of extended family members on their daily lives to explore the post-divorce extended family interactions. In addition, the supportive role of extended family following divorce was explored. Findings of the current study converged in some ways with the existing literature but diverged in important and interesting ways. The divergent findings might explain how societal changes experienced in the last few decades might affect the divorced individuals' ongoing relationships with their extended family members.

Relationship with Extended Family Following Divorce:

A Closer Look at Contemporary Times

The relationship with extended family following a divorce became a focus of interest to researchers in family studies and family therapy in late the 1970s and 1980s. Researchers (Brown, 1982; Pattison, Defrancisco, Wood, Frazier, & Crowder, 1975; Wilson, 1986) called for the exploration of relationships with the extended family while studying psychosocial systems of family and family dynamics, especially in relation to stressful life events and mental health problems (Dressler, 1985; Lin, Ensel, Simeone, & Kuo, 1979). Early research showed that extended family plays an important role in how families deal with stressors that come with divorce and the changes experienced following divorce (Lin et al. 1979; Wilson, 1986). However, despite the importance of extended family relationships, especially during and after stressful life events such as divorce, the majority of the studies that explored post-divorce extended family relationships were conducted in late 1970s and 1980s. The scarcity of current research on post-divorce extended family relationships was the motivating force for the current paper.

The Role of Extended Family After Divorce

The importance of extended family relationships among divorced families can be examined from two perspectives. First, families going through divorce and separation undergo several readjustments in their rituals, boundaries, and relationship dynamics (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011; Emery 2011). Following divorce, families reorganize their structures; most, if not all, family tasks and customs need to be rearranged (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011). In addition to material changes such as having two households for children or changes in financial status, the characteristics and quality of relationships change following divorce (Emery, 2011). The

experience of divorce in nuclear families does not happen in a vacuum. Hence, in addition to family members in the nuclear family, the extended family system affects and is affected by the nuclear family functioning following divorce in various ways (Pattison et al., 1975). Their involvement with family members in terms of contact and emotional closeness might be affected by the experience of divorce (Ambert, 1988; Anspach, 1976). In addition, the influence that the extended family members have on nuclear family members might decrease; this is especially true for the relatives by marriage (Johnson, 1989; Spicer & Hampe, 1975).

Secondly, extended family has been positioned as one of the important elements of a social support network for individuals and families going through divorce and separation. Given the social support role that extended family might play, one can suggest that having positive relationships with extended family can provide a buffering role for distress due to divorce and enhance the quality of post-divorce relationships (Lin et al., 1979). Having extended family as a social support system can help to reduce distress and anxiety around financial matters and splitting the family (Brown, 1982). Extended family can offer advice, financial and other material resources (e.g. housing), and support for childcare (Wilson, 1986). The presence of supportive extended family might ameliorate the potential negative impacts of divorce and separation on family members (Brown, 1982).

Literature Review on Post-Divorce Extended Family Relationships and Support

Previous/earlier literature on post-divorce extended family relationships provides valuable insights to changes experienced by families. The studies examined specific areas of extended family interaction such as contact, emotional closeness, and influence of extended family members. For instance, findings from different studies suggest that there is a decrease in contact and involvement with relatives by marriage following divorce (Ambert, 1988; Anspach, 1976).

In a longitudinal study, Ambert (1988) found that the contact with former spouses' family decreases significantly immediately after separation. Additionally, following divorce, people report less emotional closeness and obligation to maintain kinship with their former in-laws (Johnson, 1989; Spicer & Hampe, 1975). The presence of children in the family tempers these effects, with divorced individuals with children maintaining contact with former spouses' family more than divorced individuals without children (Ambert, 1988).

When it comes to the support role of extended family, the involvement and reactions of extended family members may vary depending on the roles they play in the family as well as their own emotional investment in the dissolving marriage (Brown, 1982). The reactions of extended family members to the decision of divorce might also affect the social support they provide to their divorcing adult children (Brown, 1982; Hamon, 1995). If extended family members experience strong negative emotions to the divorce, this can impede the immediate, initial support for divorcing parents and the divorce adjustment process (Brown, 1982). In contrast, in a qualitative study, Hamon (1995) found that parents of divorcing children usually provide advice, emotional support, and instrumental support during and after divorce. Similarly, Serovich, Price, and Chapman (1991) explored the social support that former spouses' extended family provides for divorced individuals. They found that approval of divorce made a significant positive contribution regarding the amount of contact and support that former spouses' family provided to divorced individuals (Serovich et al., 1991).

The Role of Gender

Gender appears to play an important role in post-divorce extended family relationships. A majority of studies (Ambert, 1988; Gerstel, 1988; Serovich et al., 1991; Spicer & Hampe, 1975) reported significant gender differences in contact, closeness and support received from extended

family members following divorce. Findings from these studies suggest that females maintain more contact and closeness with and receive support from their extended family members than males do. In addition, certain gender biases were present in the theoretical framing of earlier research in regards to females being “kin-keepers” (p.210; Gerstel, 1988) and fathers being absent (Anspach, 1976). In fact, some of the studies had only female participants (Anspach, 1976; Johnson, 1986). This might be due to the early prevalence of more traditional gender views on family roles and parenting. As noted before, most of the existing literature on post-divorce extended family came from 1970s and 1980s. There has been a shift in gender biases and gender roles in the last few decades. In fact, one qualitative study (Duran-Aydintug, 1993) failed to find any gender differences in regards to post-divorce relationships with former spouses’ family. The role of gender remains as a point of interest in contemporary times; hence, in the current study, gender will be closely examined regarding post-divorce extended family interactions and support.

Changing Times and Contextual Factors

In addition to gender roles and biases, other societal changes experienced in the last few decades may require a re-examination of the post-divorce relationship with extended family. Changes in custody practices and availability of technology might impact post-divorce extended family relationships (Arendell, 1997; Kraut et al., 1998; van Krieken, 2005). First, as stated above, the majority of the studies above were conducted in late 1970s and 1980s. Recent literature focuses more on the concept of grandparenting and does not specifically focus on divorced individuals’ ongoing relationships with their extended family members (Arber & Timonen, 2012).

In the past, common custody arrangement was mothers having sole custody of their

children (van Krieken, 2005). This might have influenced the focus of researchers to female participants. In contemporary times, however, the common custody practice is joint-custody (Brinig & Buckley, 1998; van Krieken, 2005), which may require greater interaction between the parents as well as with their extended family members. As stated above, gender roles have become less rigidly defined compared to 1970s and 1980s (Arendell, 1997). The importance of fatherhood (Lamb, 2004) is becoming more recognized and emphasized by legal authorities, parent educators, and researchers. Another important change in contemporary times is the availability and use of technology. Recent developments in communications technology and the Internet might help divorced individuals remain in touch and maintain their contact with their extended family members, regardless of geographical distance (Kraut et al., 1998).

The Current Study

The current/contemporary societal changes explained above could influence the extended family relationships of divorced individuals. The goal of the current study is to examine current patterns of extended family relationships among divorced individuals. Hence, the overall research question of the current paper is “What do post-divorce relationships with extended family members look like in contemporary times?” Deriving from existing literature, different aspects of extended family relationships such as contact, closeness, and perceived influence are explored to understand post-divorce extended family interactions. Furthermore, aspects of support provided by extended family members for divorced individuals are examined in detail. Specific research questions related to post-divorce extended family interactions and support examined the following: 1) Possible differences in extended family relationships and support between one’s own family and their former spouse’s family and 2) Gender differences.

Methods

Participants

The sample is composed of 369 divorced individuals (66% women and 34% men) from 45 states in the USA. The distribution of participants' states, as classified by the Census Bureau Regions and Divisions, was the following: 16% from the Northeast, 22% from the Midwest, 43% from the South, and 19% from the West. The age range of the sample was from 19 to 72 with a median age of 36 ($M = 37.19$, $SD = 9.5$). Seventy-seven percent of the sample reported their ethnicity as being White/Caucasian. Eleven percent identified as African American, about 6% as Hispanic, 4% as Asian, 1 % as Native American, and remaining participants identified themselves as multiracial. The sample is relatively well educated with more than 99% reporting having received at least high school diploma and 45% of the sample reporting having at least bachelor's degree. The annual income level was below \$20,000 for 11% of the sample and above \$90,000 for 7% of the sample. Reported income level of about half of the sample fell between \$30,000 and \$60,000, with a median income in the \$40,000 to \$49,000 range.

On average, respondents were divorced for 4.8 years ($SD = 4.8$). Sixty percent of the sample reported having joint custody, 30% reported having sole custody and 10% reported that their former spouse has sole custody. More than half of the sample reported being awarded child support by the court while 26% of the sample was ordered by the court to pay child support.

Measures

Demographic variables. Respondents provided general demographic information such as age, gender, ethnicity, income, and education. Additionally, participants were asked to report the time since divorce, and current custody arrangement.

Relationship with extended family. Participants were asked to respond to items regarding three areas of their relationship with extended family: contact, emotional closeness, and

perceived influence.

Contact. Contact-related individual items examined the divorced individuals' current contact with their extended family members including frequency of contact (How often do you have contact with your extended family), who initiates contact (How often do you/your extended family initiates contact), and mode of contact. Three items assessed the frequency and initiation of contact. The participants were also given a list of different modes of communication (e.g. face-to-face contact, videoconferencing, phone, social media, and mail) and asked to rate how frequently each mode was used. All items had 5 point Likert scale ranging from (1) *Never* to (5) *Very Often*. All of these questions were asked for both participants' own family and their former spouses' family.

Emotional Closeness. The degree of emotional closeness with one's own extended family and with the extended family of the former spouse was measured using an adaptation of the Closeness Scale (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1991). For each item, the original wording "your mother" and "your father" was replaced with "your family" and "your former spouse's family". The response options were a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *Not at all* to (5) *Very*. Buchanan and her colleagues (1991) reported Cronbach alphas of .89 for mothers and .90 for fathers. The alpha levels from the current sample were .90 and .82 for their own family and for their former spouses' family, respectively.

Perceived influence. In this section, the participants were asked to report the level of influence their own family and their former spouses' family has on them and their current life. Four individual items assessed the extent of influence the extended family members hold on the participants. Sample items include, "My own extended family influence who I am as a person" and "My former spouse's extended family influence my decision-making processes".

To examine the change in influence that occurs as a result of the divorce, participants were asked to identify the most influential extended family members from both their own families and their former spouses' families. Three statements asked about people's perceptions of change in different aspects of relationship; contact, emotional closeness, and influence. They were also asked to report on the perceived change in their overall relationship after divorce. Response options are (1) decreased significantly to (5) increased significantly.

Support provided by extended family.

Support for divorce adjustment. In order to assess extended family support for general post-divorce adjustment, we utilized the "Support Scale" from Serovich, Chapman, and Price (1992). This 11-item scale measures common areas of support that extended family members can provide including advice giving, emotional support, and instrumental support (i.e. financial needs and childcare). Serovich and her colleagues (1992) conceptualized support from relatives as a bi-directional relationship and combined seeking and receiving help/support together in their items. Their principle components factor analysis showed that these 11 items comprise one factor that accounts for 87.2% of variance (Serovich et al., 1992). In the current sample, the alphas were .93 and .95, for one's own extended family and one's former spouse's extended family respectively.

Supportive influence toward former spouse. To measure how supportive extended family members are of the participant's ongoing relationship with their former spouse, participants rated how supportive the most influential relative from their own family and their former spouse's family is in nine areas, on a 5-point scale ranging from not at all to very supportive. Sample items include "My family/former spouse's family wants me to be in good terms with my former spouse", "My family/former spouse's family tells me that I need to get along with my former

spouse”, “My family/former spouse’s family encourages me to co-parent with my former spouse.” All items were averaged to create the scale. As this was a scale we developed, we conducted a pilot study with 50 divorced individuals in order to establish the psychometric properties of the scale. Findings from the pilot study revealed that the Cronbach alphas were .96 for both support from their own family and their former spouses’ family. The current sample has alpha levels of .93 for their own extended family and .94 for their former spouses’ extended family.

Extended families’ reactions to divorce. The participants were asked to retrospectively report on reactions of extended family members to their decision to divorce. The specific item was “Overall, did your extended family react positively or negatively when you told them you were getting a divorce?” The response option was (1) *Very Negative* to (4) *Very Positive*.

Procedures

Participants completed an online survey study using Qualtrics.com. The non-random sample was recruited through Mechanical Turk (MTurk), an online market where you can post jobs (in this case a survey) for respondents to complete for a specified rate (called HIT reward rate). The site is hosted by Amazon.com and all respondents have an Amazon account through which all transactions are handled. Studies have been conducted to test the quality of data obtained from MTurk platform for social and behavioral sciences. Findings suggest that data collected through MTurk are at least good as other recruitment strategies through Social Media or face-to-face (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Casler, Bickel, & Hackett, 2013). MTurk samples are also more socio-economically and ethnically diverse than samples collected through other recruitment strategies (Buhrmester et al. 2011; Casler et al., 2013). The survey took about 15 minutes to fill out. The rate of participant reimbursement for the current study was \$0.40.

Only former spouses who have biological and/or adopted children together were included in the sample. Additional restrictions to the sample included access to internet and English fluency. Four hundred divorced individuals completed the survey. Twenty individuals did not answer attention questions correctly and 11 people did not meet inclusion criteria thus were not included in the final sample of 369 participants.

Results

Because the research question is exploratory in nature, we conducted mostly descriptive analyses in order to understand the relationship with extended family members following divorce. Univariate analyses were utilized to calculate percentages of post-divorce extended family interactions, and paired samples t-tests were utilized to explore the different experiences of divorced individuals with their own families and their former spouses' extended families. Independent samples t-test analyses were conducted in order to explore the possible gender differences in the current relationship with extended family members.

Post-Divorce Extended Family Interactions

Contact. The participants were asked to report the frequency of contact with extended family members. Results revealed that 14% of the sample reported very rare to no contact with extended family members from their own family and almost 60% of the sample reported rare to no contact with extended family members from their former spouses family. In addition, 63% of the sample reported that they had frequent contact with their own family while only 11% reported having frequent contact with their former spouse's family.

Table 1.

Paired Samples T-test for Contact (N = 347).

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Your Own</i>		<i>Former Spouses'</i>		<i>t</i>
	<i>Family</i>		<i>Family</i>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
<i>Frequency of Contact</i>	3.73	1.02	2.32	1.02	20.784***
<i>Initiation of Contact</i>					
Self	3.56	1.02	2.14	1.01	20.117***
Extended Family	3.50	1.06	2.15	1.01	19.202***

*** $p < .001$

As shown in Table 1, paired samples t-test analyses revealed a significant difference in frequency and initiation of contact (both self and extended family) between own extended families and former spouse's extended families. Participants reported that they had more frequent contact and initiated more contact with their own extended family than they did with their former spouse's extended family. Similarly, members of their own extended family initiated contact more than their former spouse's extended family members did. We also looked at the difference between self- and extended family initiation of contact for the same family. Paired samples t-test analyses revealed no significant difference between who initiated contact for the same family. People reported that they initiated contact in similar frequency with the members of their extended family (both their own family and their former spouses' family).

The role of gender was also examined in contact with extended family members. Gender played a significant role only for divorced individuals' contact with their own families. Females reported significantly more contact with their own families than males did ($M_{male} = 3.49$, M_{female}

=3.86, $t(341) = -3.243$, $p < .001$). In addition, extended family members from one's own family initiated significantly more contact with females than males ($M_{male} = 3.29$, $M_{female} = 3.63$, $t(341) = -2.830$, $p < .01$). There were no significant gender differences with participants' initiation of contact with their own family. Also, there were no significant gender differences for all items related to contact with former spouse's family.

Table 2.

Mode of Contact (N = 348).

	<i>Your Own</i>		<i>Former Spouses'</i>		
	<i>Family</i>		<i>Family</i>		
<i>Variables</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>
<i>Face-to-face</i>	3.29	1.09	2.07	1.00	16.823***
<i>Phone</i>	3.65	1.04	2.16	1.06	21.293***
<i>Instant Messaging</i>	3.37	1.29	1.99	1.15	17.539***
<i>Videoconferencing</i>	1.99	1.19	1.34	.75	10.970***
<i>Social Media</i>	3.20	1.32	2.08	1.17	15.211***
<i>Letters and/or postcards</i>	1.97	1.10	1.46	.81	9.515***

*** $p < .001$

Participants also reported the use of different modes of contact with extended family members from their own families versus the former spouses' families. They utilized every mode of contact significantly more with their own families than with their former spouses' families. Table 2 summarizes the frequency of contact with each mode of contact. Based on mean scores, use of instant messaging and social media in addition to face-to-face and phone communication were utilized more frequently than other modes of contact.

Emotional closeness. In terms of closeness, divorced individuals reported different levels of closeness with extended family members from their own families and former spouses' families. Paired samples t-test analyses revealed that divorced individuals experienced significantly higher levels of closeness toward their own families ($M = 3.59$) than former spouses' families ($M = 2.18$; $t(366) = 23.315$, $p < .001$). Independent samples t-test analyses were utilized to examine the role of gender in relation to closeness to extended family members. The results showed that there was no significant difference between genders in relation to closeness to extended family members.

Perceived influence. The participants were asked to rate the perceived influence that extended family has on their current lives. The results of paired samples t-test showed that divorced individuals found the extended family members from their own family significantly more influential than their former spouses' family. Table 3 lists influence- related questions and presents the findings of paired samples t-test analyses.

Table 3.

Perceived Influence of Extended Family Members (N = 378).

	<i>Your Own</i>		<i>Former Spouses'</i>		
	<i>Family</i>		<i>Family</i>		
<i>Variables</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>
<i>It is important to maintain ties with them</i>	4.04	1.12	2.31	1.32	22.137***
<i>They influence who I am as a person</i>	3.36	1.29	1.66	1.00	22.430***
<i>They influence my decision-making processes</i>	3.08	1.29	1.60	.92	20.572***
<i>They influence my daily routines</i>	2.78	1.37	1.47	.85	18.625***

*** $p < .001$

Gender seemed to make no significant difference in relation to perceived influence of extended family members except for one item. The influence of extended family members from their own family on their daily routines appeared significantly more for males than females ($M_{males} = 3.00$, $M_{females} = 2.69$, $t(354) = 2.102$, $p < .05$).

Participants were also asked to report the most important people from each of their extended families before divorce. Sixty percent of the sample reported the most influential person from their own family was their mother. In regards to their former spouses' family, more than half of the sample stated that the most influential person was their mother-in-law. Divorced individuals were also asked to report the change that they experience after divorce in relation to

contact, closeness, perceived influence, and overall relationship with the most influential people they picked from their own families and their former spouses' families. Most of the participants reported that decrease in contact (81.5%), closeness (80%), and perceived influence (84%) with members from their former spouses' families. In contrast, most of the sample reported increase in contact (79%), closeness (79%), and perceived influence (78%) with members from their own families.

Support Provided by Extended Family

Support for divorce adjustment. In order to understand the support for their divorce adjustment, Support Scale (Serovich et al., 1992) was utilized. First, paired samples t-test analyses were conducted in order to examine the difference between support received from one's own family and his/her former spouse's family. Results showed that there were significant differences between the support received from two families ($M_{yourfamily} = 3.30$, $M_{otherfamily} = 1.81$, $t(368) = 23.622$, $p < .001$).

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to test the role of gender regarding the support received from extended family. There were no significant differences between males and females regarding support received from their own family and their former spouse's family. Lastly, age, years since divorced, and their interaction were included in the multiple regression analyses related to support received from extended family. Separate multiple regression analyses were conducted for overall scale for participants' own families and their former spouses' families. Results revealed that participants' age made a unique and separate contribution but not years since divorce or interaction of age and years since divorce for support ($F(3, 332) = 2.620$, $p = .05$, $R^2 = .023$; $\beta = -.020$, $p < .01$) that they receive from their own family. Results also showed that years since divorce but not age nor their interaction made a unique and significant

contribution to support ($F(3, 332) = 3.966, p < .01, R^2 = .035; \beta = -.082, p < .05$) from participants' former spouses' family.

Support for maintaining relationship with former spouse. In addition to support for post-divorce adjustment, we explored the support the extended family members provided to divorced individuals specifically about their ongoing relationship with their former spouse. Supportive influence of extended family members for relationship with former spouse significantly differed across families. Paired samples t-test analyses revealed that participants reported receiving significantly more support from their own family than their former spouses' family for their ongoing relationship with their former spouse ($M_{\text{yourfamily}} = 2.73, M_{\text{otherfamily}} = 2.22, t(367) = 9.329, p < .001$).

In order to examine the role of gender, independent samples t-test analysis was conducted. Results revealed that there was a significant difference between males ($M = 2.95$) and females ($M = 2.62; t(362) = 2.825, p < .01$) regarding the supportive influence they received from their own family. The support they received from their former spouses' family did not significantly differ between genders.

The role of reaction to divorce on support provided. Participants were also asked to report the extended family members' reactions to divorce. Paired-samples t-test analyses revealed that there was a significant difference in relation to how each family reacted to participants' decision to divorce ($M_{\text{ownfamily}} = 2.65, M_{\text{otherfamily}} = 2.05, t(367) = 11.786, p < .001$). We ran linear regression analyses with the reaction to divorce and total scores of support scales in order to explore the effects of reactions to divorce on support received from extended family. The results showed that if extended family reacted positively to the decision to divorce, they were significantly more likely to provide support to their divorced relatives. This was true for

overall divorce adjustment for one's own family ($F(1, 366) = 32.149, p < .001, R^2 = .081; \beta = .312, p < .001$) and for former spouse's family ($F(1, 366) = 22.121, p < .001, R^2 = .057; \beta = .236, p < .001$). We see interesting results when it comes to the role of reaction with support for maintaining relationship with former spouse. It was found that if your own extended family reacted positively to your decision to divorce, they were less inclined to provide support to maintain an ongoing relationship with your former spouse ($F(1, 366) = 3.931, p < .05, R^2 = .011; \beta = -.127, p < .05$). However, it was reversed with reaction of former spouse's family to decision to divorce and their support for your ongoing relationship with your former spouse ($F(1, 366) = 5.231, p < .05, R^2 = .014; \beta = .144, p < .05$).

Discussion

The current paper explored the contemporary extended family relationships among divorced individuals with children. Deriving from existing literature, various post-divorce extended family relationships were examined for contact, emotional closeness, and perceived influence. In addition, support received for divorce adjustment, support received for ongoing relationship with former spouses, and the role of extended family's reactions to divorce were examined. Findings from the current study appear to converge with the findings of the existing literature in some ways. However, there are also findings especially in relation to the role of gender that seem to diverge from the existing knowledge. These different findings might point the effects of societal changes such as gender roles, which was the motivating force for the current study.

Consistent with previous findings (Ambert, 1988; Anspach, 1976), divorced individuals have significantly less contact with their former spouses' family than their own family. This difference holds true for the overall frequency of contact as well as initiation of contact.

Divorced individuals initiated significantly less contact with their former spouses' family and the former spouses' family initiated less contact with divorced individuals. In addition, the significant difference also seems true for emotional closeness that divorced individuals feel toward their extended family members (Johnson, 1989; Spicer & Hampe, 1975). Divorced individuals reported significantly less closeness toward extended family members from their former spouses' family than their own family. Likewise, people's perceptions of the influence that their own extended family has on their daily lives were significantly higher than the perceived influence of former spouse's family.

Another point of interest was the change perceived in contact, closeness, and perceived influence following the divorce experience. The existing literature states that the interactions with extended family decrease significantly right after divorce, especially with former spouses' family (Ambert, 1988; Anspach, 1976). In our study, we asked participants to report the change they experienced in contact, closeness, perceived influence with the most influential person from both sides of the family before divorce. Divorced individuals reported decrease in contact, closeness, and perceived influence with the person from former spouses' family; however, they had increased levels of contact, closeness, and influence with the person from their own side.

When we look at the support that extended family provides to divorced individuals, we see the similar pattern with extended family of both sides. Divorced individuals' own family provided significantly more support for overall divorce adjustment and for ongoing relationship between former spouses, compared to former spouses' extended family. These differences were consistent with previous literature. For instance, Anspach (1976) found that 74% of his sample reported receiving support from own extended family, whereas only 23% of divorced individuals received support from former spouses' extended family.

This study introduces a new support type and scale: support for ongoing relationship between former spouses. As the sample is composed of co-parents, the assumption was that the co-parents would continue to have a relationship as they do have children together. Presence of children in the nuclear family, in fact, might increase the level of contact involvement of extended families from both sides (Ambert, 1988). By extension, extended family might provide support for their divorced relatives to maintain their relationship to effectively co-parent their children. When we examined the support for ongoing relationship by extended family, we found that overall both extended family members provided moderate levels of support and people's own extended family provided significantly more support than former spouses' family.

Another important convergence with existing literature was observed with the role of reactions of extended family's to the decision to divorce and the support they provided to divorced family members. As findings from previous studies suggest, reactions of extended family members can play a significant role and change the amount of support they provide (Brown, 1982; Hamon, 1995). In our study, we found that if extended family from both sides reacted positively to the decision of divorce, they provided more support for their relatives' divorce adjustment, through advice giving, instrumental, and emotional support. When we looked at the support for ongoing relationship between former spouses, we see some mixed results. If one's own extended family reacted positively to the decision of divorce, they provided less support for maintaining relationship between former spouses. On contrary, former spouses' extended family provided more support, if they reacted positively to the decision of divorce.

When we look at the role of gender, there appears to be some inconsistencies with previous literature. In terms of contact, females reported significantly more contact with their own family but it is also found that their own family initiated more contact with females than

with males. There was no significant difference between males and females in relation to their initiation of contact with the extended family members from both families. These findings contradict findings from previous studies (Ambert, 1988; Gerstel, 1988; Serovich et al., 1991; Spicer & Hampe, 1975) and their explanation of women as “kin-keepers”. Similarly, there were no significant differences between genders in relation to emotional closeness that they feel toward their extended family members. These inconsistencies might be attributable to changes in recent/current societal attitudes toward gender roles. Another possibility might be changes in the custody practices. As joint custody has become more prevalent (van Krieken, 2005), it might invite both genders to be present and involved with extended family members equally.

Limitations and Significance of the Current Study

The current study has various limitations that should be noted here. First, this is a cross-sectional study that can only provide a snapshot of divorced individuals’ experience at the time of the survey. Although, we asked retrospective questions that aim to get a sense of change experienced following divorce, the results do not answer the question of how extended family relationships change during and after divorce. Also, the current study is mono-informant. The study does not provide information on former spouses’ perceptions; nor does it allow us to explore the extended family members’ perception of interactions and support that they provide. Despite the fact that the current study explores the interactions and relationships that are systemic in nature, dyadic analyses cannot be performed with mono-informant data.

Despite its limitations, the current study provides up-to-date information regarding post-divorce extended family interactions as well as supportive role of extended family. The findings of the current study call for further exploration of the role of societal changes experienced in the few decades. In the current sample, we aimed to have a more diverse sample for the purposes of

providing a foundational insight on contemporary post-divorce extended family relationships but future studies should narrow down their sample characteristics to explore different important variables such as race and ethnicity. Accordingly, cross-cultural studies can provide valuable information regarding the role of importance of kin-keeping and value of “being a family” in different nations and cultures.

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Extended Family as a Social Support Network:

Post-divorce Experiences and Co-parenting

Abstract

One of the important protective factors for families undergoing divorce is support from extended family members. Existing literature suggests that extended family members can provide support for post-divorce adjustment and relationships. The co-parenting relationship is an important element for post-divorce adjustment of individual family members as well as family-level adjustments to divorce. To date, there is no empirical study that examines the role of extended family support on post-divorce co-parenting. The current study employs the Double ABCX Family Stress Model to understand post-divorce experiences of co-parents and places extended family support as resources for divorced co-parents. The sample was composed of 369 divorced individuals (34% male and 66% female) with children between the ages of birth to 18. Participants reported on divorce-related stressors, their perceptions of the divorce experience, and post-divorce co-parenting. They also reported on different types of support that they receive from their extended family members. Results revealed that extended family support can play a moderating role in relationship between people's experiences of divorce-related stressors and their perceptions of divorce as well as post-divorce co-parenting. In addition, divorce perception and ongoing attachment to the former spouse mediated the relationship between divorce-related stressors and post-divorce co-parenting. Clinical implications are discussed.

Extended Family as a Social Support Network: Post-divorce Experiences and Co-parenting

Social support from the extended family network has been emphasized as an important predictive factor of divorce-related experiences for families (Serovich, Price, & Chapman, 1992; Hamon, 1995). Families going through a divorce are faced with many changes and adaptations in their daily experiences and relationships with family members (Emery, 2011). Research suggests that extended family members can play a social support role in relation to co-parents' experiences of overall stress due to divorce (Serovich et al., 1992). One of the most important elements for psychological adjustment of children and parents to the experience of divorce is the post-divorce co-parenting relationship (Ahrons, 2007; Kelly, 2000; Mitcham-Smith & Henry, 2007). Feinberg (2002) conceptualized extended family support as a protective factor for the post-divorce co-parenting relationship. However, to date, there is no empirical study that examines the role of extended family support on the relationship between divorce-related experiences and post-divorce co-parenting. The current study aims to fill this gap in the literature.

The co-parenting relationship becomes a more salient way of interacting between divorced couples, as the spousal relationship terminates (McIntosh & Deacon-Wood, 2003; Roberson, Nalbone, Hecker, & Miller, 2010). It is linked to different dyadic and family-level adjustments as well as children's well-being following divorce (Ahrons, 2007; Macie & Stolberg, 2003; Whisman, 2001). Quality of the post-divorce co-parenting relationship is associated with other post-divorce interactions and divorce-related changes. Because of these complex associations of post-divorce family relationships, we employed the Double ABCX Family Stress Model (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983) in order to examine the possible moderating role of social

support from extended family on the associations between divorce related stress, adaptation to divorce experience, and post-divorce co-parenting.

Theoretical Framework

The Double ABCX Model of Family Stress is an expansion of the original ABCX model developed by Reuben Hill (1958). Hill (1958) theorized that adjustment and adaptation of families to a crisis or stressful life event (X) is related to details of stressor event (A), resources available to families (B), and their perceptions and meanings of stressors and resources (C). McCubbin and Patterson (1983) stated that the original ABCX model is good for assessing short-term experiences; however experiences of families in the face of a crisis and their level of adjustment is a long-term process. Therefore, the Double ABCX model includes both pre-crisis and post-crisis factors and long-term adaptation/maladaptation (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983).

According to the Double ABCX model, factor A (stressor) is defined as a stress-inducing event “which produces, or has the potential of producing, change in the family social system” (p. 7, McCubbin & Pattison, 1983). According to the model, in addition to the event itself there is a pile-up of stressors that the event brings (factor aA). For instance, divorce is a stress-inducing event and it also brings different stressors and strains such as financial challenges and housing. In terms of resources (bB factor), a family has different adaptive resources that they can utilize while facing stressors and strains. These can include personal resources of family members, internal resources of the family system, and social and community support. The cC factor is conceptualized as the family’s perceptions and meanings around the crisis, stressors, and resources. The perceptions of family members will either improve or hinder the adjustment and adaptation of family to changing circumstances. McCubbin and Patterson (1983) asserted that a family’s adaptation (xX factor) occurs on a continuum from maladaptation to bonadaptation.

In the current study, we utilized the Double ABCX model in order to explore extended family relationships as a resource for post-divorce co-parenting. Therefore, in this study, the aA factor is the divorce and its related stressors such as financial changes and housing problems. The bB factor is support from extended family members. The perceptions of former spouses of divorce and their ongoing attachment/differentiation to one another will be conceptualized as cC factor. The outcome or adaptation variable will be the quality of post-divorce co-parenting relationship between former spouses.

Literature Review

Divorce as a stressful life event (aA factor)

Divorce as a legal process is a stress-inducing event (Emery, 2011). Families going through litigation and mediation might experience confusion and conflict (Emery, 2011). Adjustment to divorce and post-divorce relationships is highly correlated with how hostile/amicable the divorce process is (Kline, Johnston, & Tschann, 1991). In addition to the legal and interpersonal stressors of divorce, families experience continued stress as their financial, housing, and social support systems are changed. After divorce, both parents, but particularly women, experience decreases in their income (Amato, 2000; Wang & Amato, 2000). Additionally, moving to another place and having two separate households can be other potential stressors that divorce brings. Family members might struggle with having two separate households and becoming single-parent units (Ahrons, 2007; Emery, 2011). Lastly, people can experience decrease in their social network following divorce. Friends or family members can lose contact with divorcing individuals due to emotional loyalties or geographical locations. Regardless, experiencing shrink in social network produce even more stress for divorcing and divorced individuals (Wang & Amato, 2000).

Extended family as resources (bB factor)

Scholars have suggested that the extended family can serve as an important resource to individuals and families going through stressful experiences. Lin, Ensel, Simeone, and Kuo (1979), for example, suggested that the extended family can help buffer a family against negative outcomes when an individual or a family experiences life changing events and physical or mental illness (Lin et al., 1979). Having supportive relatives might ameliorate the experienced psychosocial stress after a stress inducing life-changing event. Social support systems, including extended family, can play a mediator or moderator role in individuals' and/or families' response to mental illness and stress (Lin et al., 1979).

Research on the role of extended family in divorce supports this stance. For example, having extended family as a social support system can help to reduce distress and anxiety around financial matters and splitting the family (Brown, 1982; Serovich et al., 1992). Extended family can offer advice, financial and other material resources (e.g. house to live), and support for childcare (Wilson, 1986). In a qualitative study, Hamon (1995) found that parents of divorcing children usually provide advice, emotional support, and instrumental support during and after divorce. Following the divorce the extended family may also affect post-divorce co-parenting directly or indirectly. Extended family can provide a social support network for divorce-related experiences (Hamon, 1995; Serovich et al., 1992; Gürmen et al., 2015), which in turn might alleviate the overall stress the co-parents experience. Extended family members can also provide support for ongoing relationship between former spouses (Gürmen et al., 2015). This might influence the co-parenting relationship by encouraging continuing communication and cooperation between co-parents. However, not much is known in regards to direct or indirect effects of extended family members on co-parenting.

Perceptions of divorce experience and extended family (cC factor)

The Double ABCX model highlights the importance of people's perceptions and meanings around the stressors and available resources when exploring adjustment and adaptation to stressors. In the current study, perceptions of divorce experience and ongoing attachment to former spouse are considered to be cC factor. Co-parents' perception of divorce being beneficial or detrimental to their current situation is crucial (Amato, 2000; Forste & Heaton, 2004). For example, if a co-parent believes that divorcing has worsened their current situation, they are more likely to experience negative emotions, and in turn, might experience more conflict in their co-parenting relationship (Madden-Derdich, Leonard, & Christopher, 1999). In addition, ongoing attachment and boundary ambiguity between former spouses might create more conflict in co-parental relationship following divorce (Madden-Derdich et al., 1999).

Post-divorce co-parenting (xX factor)

Co-parenting after divorce is one of the most important factors impacting the psychological adjustment of children and other members of the family (Ahrons, 2007; Kelly, 2000; Mitcham-Smith & Henry, 2007). Since the spousal relationship terminates after divorce, the co-parenting relationship becomes the most salient form of relating to one's former partner. While exploring children's well-being and family relationships, researchers found that the relationship between co-parents was one of the main influences that affect the quality of post-divorce relationships (Amato & Keith, 1991; Camara & Resnick, 1989; Maccoby, Depner, & Mnookin, 1990). Studies have consistently found that cooperative co-parenting is the most beneficial co-parenting type for child outcomes (Macie & Stolberg, 2003; Marriott, 2011; McHale, 1995). Therefore, looking at post-divorce co-parenting as an xX factor will provide a significant insight to adjustment and adaptation of families to divorce.

Due to its importance, many studies explored the factors that affect quality of co-parenting. Among divorced families, existing literature suggests that some of the factors that affect the co-parenting relationship include length and quality of the divorce process, the number of years since divorce, and relationship between divorced co-parents (Ganong, Coleman, Markham, & Rothrauff, 2011). Social support can also play a protective role for co-parental relationships after divorce (Feinberg, 2002). When co-parents receive supportive messages from their social network about having a positive co-parenting relationship with their former spouses, they are more like to have a cooperative co-parenting (Ganong et al., 2011). Additionally, having social support system around them helps co-parents to better cope with personal distress that, in turn, leads to a higher quality co-parental relationship (Johnson, 1987).

The Current Study

The current study uses the Double ABCX model to explore the relationship between divorce and its associated stressors, perceptions of the divorce, and co-parenting. In particular, we will examine the role extended family relationships may play as potential resources to individuals experiencing divorce. Using the Double ABCX model, we will test the following hypotheses:

H1: Divorce-related stressors will negatively impact post-divorce co-parenting.

H2: Divorce-related stressors will negatively impact perceptions of divorce. Higher levels of divorce-related stress will produce more negative views and meanings around divorce and less attachment to former spouse.

H3: Positive perceptions of divorce will be positively related to post-divorce co-parenting. More positive perceptions regarding the experience of divorce will result in more cooperative post-divorce co-parenting.

H4: Perception of divorce will mediate the relationship between divorce stressors and the quality of co-parenting relationship.

H5: Extended family support will moderate the relationships described above. Higher levels of support from extended family will ameliorate the negative effects of divorce-related stressors on perceptions of divorce and post-divorce co-parenting.

Methods

Participants

This national convenience sample is composed of 369 divorced individuals with at least one child with their former spouse. Sixty-six percent of the sample were women and 34% of the sample were men. Sixteen percent of respondents were from the Northeast, 22% from Midwest, 43% from South, and 19% from West regions of the U.S. The median age of participants was 36 years and ranged from 19 to 72 ($M = 37.19$, $SD = 9.5$). The majority of the sample identified their ethnicity as White/Caucasian (77%). The remaining 23% of the sample were composed of African American (11%), Hispanic (6%), Asian (4%), Native American (1%), and multiracial (1%). The sample was well-educated with only 0.5% of the sample reporting having less education than a high school diploma. Almost half of the sample had at least a bachelor's degree. In regards to income level, more than half of the sample reported their income level to be between \$30,000 and \$59,000 with a median of 40,000 to 49,000 (11% = below \$20,000 and 7% = above \$90,000).

The average time since divorce was 4.8 years ($SD = 4.8$) in the sample. More than half of the sample (60%) had joint custody of their children with their former spouse. Thirty percent reported that they have the sole custody and 10% reported that their former spouse has sole custody. More than half of the sample reported being awarded child support by the court and

another 26% of the sample were ordered by the court to pay child support.

Measures

The following measures were utilized to explore divorce-related stressors, perceptions of divorce, post-divorce co-parenting, and different aspects of post-divorce extended family support.

Divorce related stressors (aA factor). Divorce-related stressors are defined as “the series of events and interactional experiences that family members encounter during the process of divorce and included phenomena which occurred from the filing date to [the study]” (p.67; Buehler, Hogan, Robinson, & Levy, 1986). Buehler and Langenbrunner (1987) created a 140-item “Divorce Related Stressors” questionnaire. In their questionnaire, they had some items related to extended family relationships and co-parenting. Furthermore, they had items that measure the perceptions of divorce and divorce-related stressors. We modified the original scale by removing items that were measuring perceptions in order to eliminate cross-contamination among variables for the current study.

We adapted the original Divorce Related Stressors (Buehler & Langenbrunner, 1987) to create a 36-item checklist for divorce-related stressors that focused solely on concrete behavioral outcomes rather than perceptions. We utilized economic, housing, legal, and parent-child stressors as categories and included additional categories such as personal, occupational, household, and reasons for divorce in order to gather a finer picture in relation to pile-up stressors that divorced co-parents experience following divorce. Divorce-related stressors are composed of 36 individual items with yes/no options. In order to get a composite score, total number of yes answers were calculated for each participant and used in the analyses. Hence, the scores of this measure fall between 0 to 36, with higher scores representing a higher number of

divorce-related stressors experienced.

Extended family as resources (bB factor). In order to measure the role of extended family as social support, we utilized the Support Scale (Serovich et al., 1992) and Supportive Influence toward Former Spouse Scale.

Help/support. The “Support Scale” was created by Serovich and his colleagues (1992) to measure the support that extended family provides following divorce. The scale has 11 items that target advice giving, emotional support, and instrumental support (i.e. financial needs and childcare) that extended family members provide. The authors did not provide Cronbach’s alpha in their study but they reported that 11 items loads on one factor that accounts for 87.2% of variance (Serovich et al., 1992). Sample items included “Supported me.”, “Gave me advice”, “Babysat for me”, and “Lent or gave me money” The Cronbach alphas in the current sample were .93 and .95 for their own extended family and their former spouses’ extended family, respectively.

Supportive influence toward former spouse. In addition to general support that extended family members provide following divorce, we were interested in measuring how supportive extended family members are of the participant’s ongoing relationship with their former spouse. In order to measure supportive influence of extended family members on the ongoing relationship between former spouses, we created a scale with 9 items. For this measure, we asked participants to think about the most influential relative in their own families and their former spouse’s families. Sample items included “My extended family wants me to be on good terms with my former spouse”, “My extended family supports me keeping in touch with my former spouse”, and “My extended family tells me that I need to get along with my former spouse”. They were instructed to rate nine items from (1) not at all to (5) very. In order to establish the

psychometric properties of this new scale, we conducted a pilot study with 50 divorced individuals. Findings from the pilot study revealed that the Cronbach alphas were .96 for both support from their own family and their former spouses' family. Findings from the current study revealed that the Cronbach alphas were .93 for their own extended family and .94 for their former spouses' extended family.

Perceptions of divorce experience (cC factor). While pile-up stressors measure the concrete, observable, behavioral stressors related to divorce, the cC factor measures people's perceptions of divorce experience and their current situation following divorce. Former spouses' perceptions of divorce were measured by the "Divorce Adjustment Scale", a 9-item questionnaire created by Wang and Amato (2000). Items on this scale measure the perceptions and meanings of people regarding the divorce experience. Factor analyses by the original creators of the scale revealed two factors; overall divorce adjustment and attachment to ex-spouse with alpha levels of .77 and .76, respectively (Wang & Amato, 2000). Sample items for the divorce adjustment subscale included "Has your divorce improved or worsened your peace of mind?" and "Looking back, do you think the divorce was a good or bad idea?". For the attachment to ex-spouse factor, sample items included "I find myself wondering what my ex-spouse is doing", "I find myself spending a lot of time thinking about my ex-spouse", and "Sometimes, I can't believe that we're divorced". In the current sample, the alpha levels were .81 for overall divorce adjustment and .59 for attachment to ex-spouse.

Post-divorce co-parenting (xX factor). The Coparenting Questionnaire (CQ; Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001) was used to measure post-divorce co-parenting. The CQ is a 14-item self-report measure for parents. Although, Margolin and her colleagues created and applied the CQ to measure co-parenting in married families, it was modified and used for

divorced couples with children in different studies (Markham, Ganong, Coleman, 2007; Rye et al., 2012). The CQ items are rated as a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*) and they were grouped into three factors: cooperation, triangulation, and conflict. Sample items included “My former spouse fills me in on what happens during my child’s day”, “My former spouse uses this child to get back at me”, and “My former spouse argues with me about this child”. The Cronbach alphas for the three factors and total scale range from .69 to .87 (Margolin et al., 2001; Rye et al., 2012). The alpha level for the total CQ was .89 in the current sample (cooperation = .82, triangulation = .72, conflict = .90). Prior to running tests of mediation and moderation, we ran confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to examine the factor structure of the measures used in this study. Post-divorce co-parenting was measured by the Co-parenting Questionnaire by Margolin and her colleagues (2001) and the original scale has three factors; cooperation, triangulation, and conflict. However, using the original three factors with our sample did not produce a good fit ($\chi^2 = 689.961$ (66), $p < .001$, TLI = .75, CFI = .84, RMSEA = .16). Therefore, we combined two negative factors (conflict and triangulation) into one factor and higher scores reflected more conflict and more triangulation. The new factor, *problematic co-parenting*, and cooperative co-parenting produced an adequate fit (χ^2 (63) = 178.643, $p < .001$, TLI = .951, CFI = .971, RMSEA = .071). All factor loadings for the latent variables were significant and moderate to high.

Procedures

Participants responded to an online survey hosted by Qualtrics. Participants were recruited through Mechanical Turk (MTurk), an online market hosted by Amazon.com. It is designed for people to post jobs or surveys for respondents to complete for a specified rate (HIT reward rate). Each respondent is completely anonymous to the researcher who posts the survey.

The survey took about 15 minutes to fill out and hence, the HIT rate for the current study was \$0.40.

Studies have been conducted to test the quality of data obtained from MTurk platform for social and behavioral sciences. Findings suggest that data collected through MTurk is at least good as other recruitment strategies through Social Media or face-to-face (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Casler, Bickel, & Hackett, 2013). In fact, MTurk samples are more socio-economically and ethnically diverse than samples collected through other recruitment strategies (Buhrmester et al. 2011; Casler et al., 2013).

Four hundred divorced individuals completed the online survey. There were two attention questions throughout the survey. Twenty participants did not answer the attention questions correctly; therefore, they were not included in the data analyses. Also, 11 participants did not meet the inclusion criteria for the study and were removed, resulting in a final sample of 369 individuals.

Results

Data Analysis Strategies and Preparation

We utilized structural equation modeling (SEM) to conduct mediation testing and multiple group analyses of the moderator role of extended family support, using AMOS 22 (Arbuckle, 2013). Our measures for major study variables for mediation analyses were divorce-related stressors, divorce adjustment scale, and post-divorce co-parenting. Moderation was tested using multigroup analyses. For measures of extended family support, we had 4 different variables: own family help/support, former spouse's family help/support, own family supportive influence, and former spouse's family supportive influence. In order to create different groups,

four different data sets were created with the total score of each scales computed. We then performed a median split to have high and low support groups for multiple group analyses.

Data Analyses

Before we conducted structural equation modeling analyses in order to examine complex associations between study variables, we looked at the mean level information of the constructs that we utilize in this study in order to get a better understanding of the current sample. Table 1 summarizes the mean information of the constructs of the current study.

Table 1.

Means and Standard Deviations of Major Study Variables (N = 369).

<i>Variables</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Scale Point</i>
Divorce-related stressors	14.85	6.73	0 - 36
Overall divorce adjustment	2.19	.49	1 - 3
Attachment to ex-spouse	1.89	.82	1 - 4
Cooperative coparenting	2.79	1.29	1 - 5
Problematic coparenting	2.58	1.06	1 - 5
<i>Own extended family</i>			
Help/support	3.30	.98	1 - 5
Supportive influence	2.73	1.08	1 - 5
<i>Former spouses' extended family</i>	2.36	1.27	1 - 5
Help/support	1.81	.87	1 - 5
Supportive influence	2.22	1.07	1 - 5

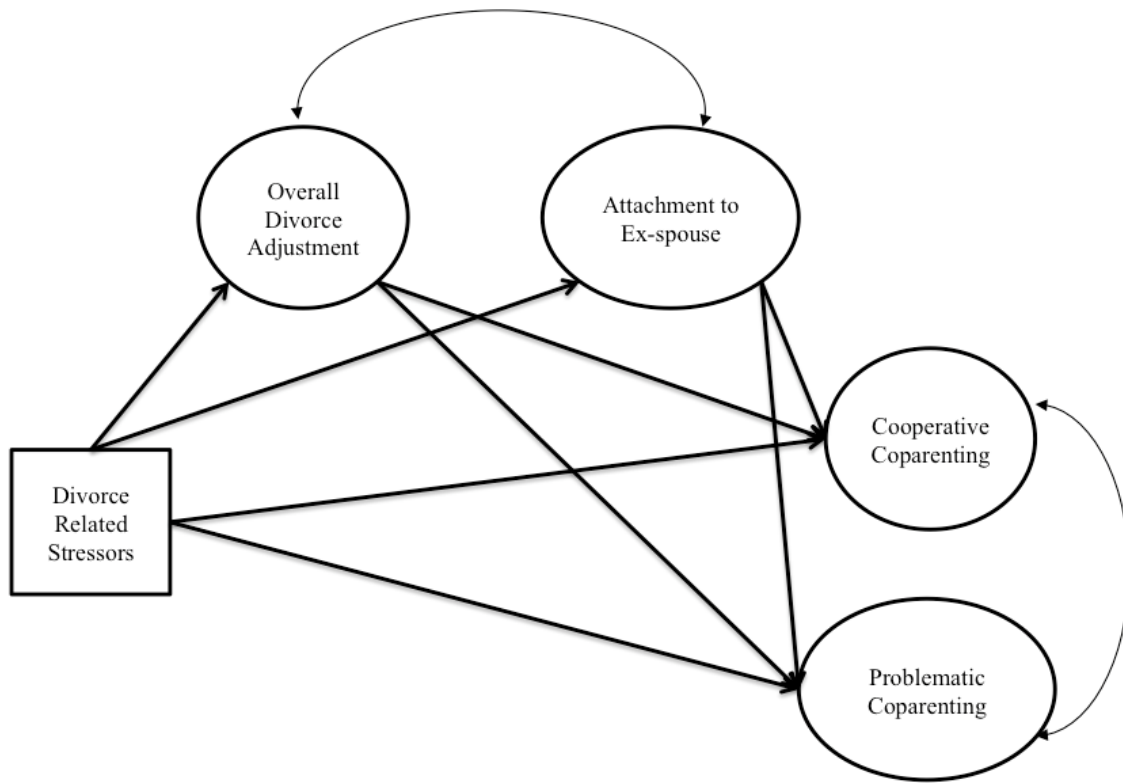


Figure 1: SEM model

Figure 1 contains the model tested in this study. Before, analyzing the structural model, CFA was conducted to test the proposed measurement model. Model fit indices ($\chi^2 = 413.018$ (206), $p < .001$, TLI = .95, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .052) demonstrated close fit (Bentler, 1990; Steiger, 1990). After establishing the measurement model, the structural model, which had divorce-related stressors as the independent variable, two divorce adjustment scale factors as mediators, and two post-divorce co-parenting factors as dependent variables, was fit to the data. Because two mediators as well as two dependent variables are factors of one scale, we expected them to covary. Model fit indices (χ^2 (225) = 447.127, $p < .001$, TLI = .95, CFI = .96, RMSEA =

.052) demonstrated close fit. As expected, there were significant covariances between overall divorce adjustment and attachment to ex-spouse ($covar = -.140$, $SE = .24$, $p < .001$) as well as cooperative co-parenting and problematic co-parenting ($covar = -.205$, $SE = .061$, $p < .001$).

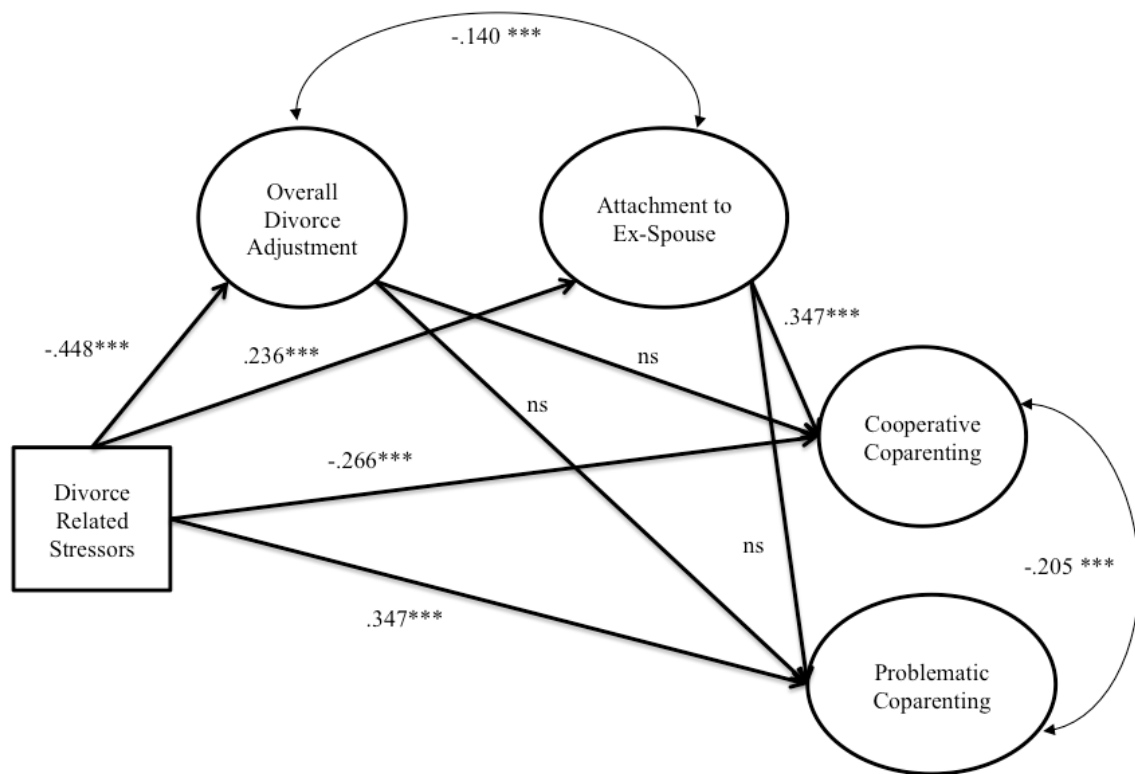


Figure 2: SEM model with beta coefficients and significance

As seen in Figure 2, significant path coefficients were observed between divorce-related stressors and both cooperative co-parenting ($\beta = .266$, $p < .001$) and problematic co-parenting ($\beta = .347$, $p < .001$). The findings support the first hypothesis, which predicts that the divorce-related stressors will negatively impact post-divorce co-parenting. Hypothesis 2 suggested the pathways between divorce-related stressors and perception of divorce would be negatively related. As seen, the paths between divorce-related stressors and overall divorce adjustment ($\beta =$

-.236, $p < .001$) as well as attachment to ex-spouse ($\beta = .448$, $p < .001$) were also significant. As predicted divorce-related stressors had a negative impact on people's overall adjustment to divorce but when it comes to attachment to former spouse there was a positive impact. Finally, the path coefficient between attachment to ex-spouse and cooperative co-parenting was significant ($\beta = .347$, $p < .001$). Hypothesis 3, which predicted a positive relationship between perception of divorce and post-divorce co-parenting, was supported.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that perception of divorce would mediate the relationship between divorce-related stressors and post-divorce co-parenting. As we have 2 mediators and 2 dependent variables, we tested mediation effects of overall divorce adjustment and attachment to ex-spouse, separately. Sobel's test results revealed that the relationship between divorce-related stressors and cooperative co-parenting was mediated by attachment to ex-spouse (Sobel's coefficient = 2.617 (.005), $p = .008$). Divorce related stressors increased a co-parent's attachment to their former spouse but decreased cooperative co-parenting. The relationship between divorce related stressors and cooperative co-parenting was mediated through the attachment to ex-spouse. However, no other possible mediation effects were supported (attachment to ex-spouse on the relationship between divorce-related stressors and problematic co-parenting (Sobel's coefficient = -.146 (.003), $p = .88$), overall divorce adjustment on the relationship between divorce-related stressors and cooperative co-parenting (Sobel's coefficient = .85 (.009), $p = .40$) and problematic co-parenting (Sobel's coefficient = -.77 (.009), $p = .44$)).

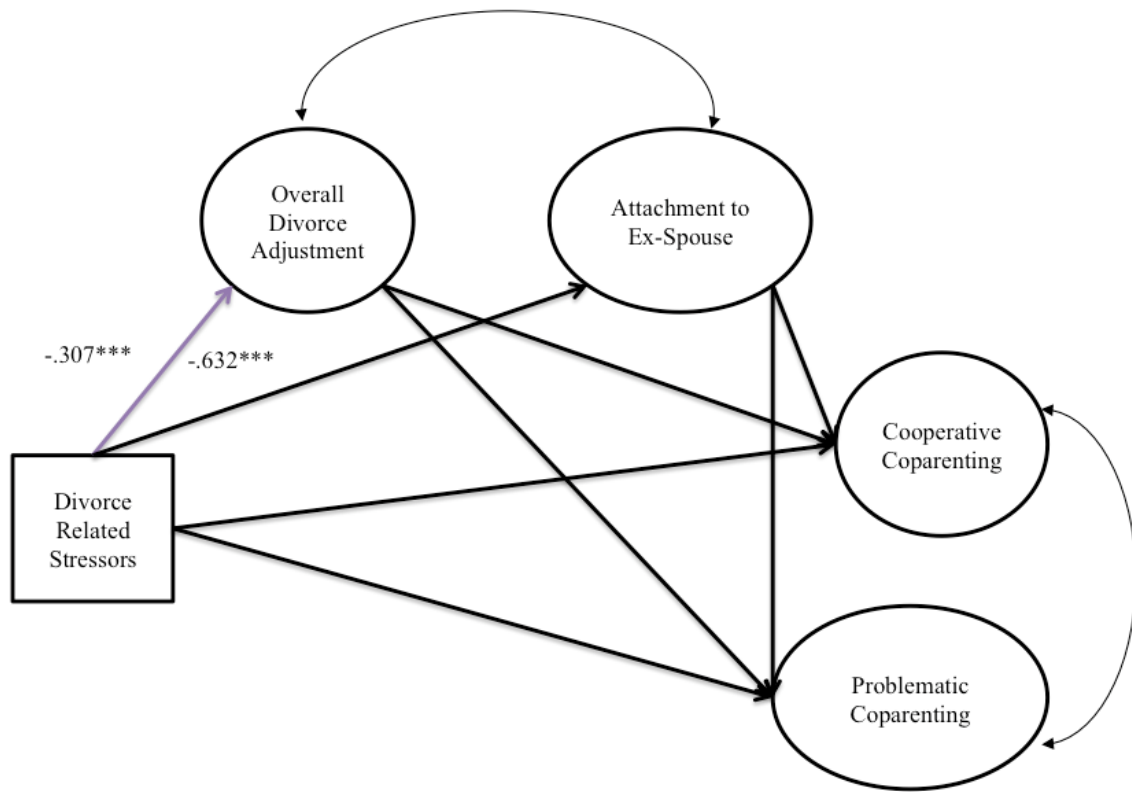


Figure 3: Multigroup difference (moderation) for former spouses' extended family support for divorce adjustment on divorce-related stressors and overall divorce adjustment.

Note. The value above the line corresponds to value of higher support group and value below the line correspond to lower support group.

Hypothesis 5 examined the role of extended family support as a moderator of the relationship between all of the tested pathways above. It was expected that higher levels of support from the extended family would result in amelioration of the negative impacts of divorce-related stressors on divorce adjustment and post-divorce co-parenting. Separate multiple group analyses were conducted to test the moderation effect of different support types from one's own family and former spouse's family. Multi-group analyses in AMOS revealed that there was

a significant chi-square change compared to unconstrained model (suggesting moderation) for two pathways. Figure 3 shows that the relationship between divorce-related stressors and overall divorce adjustment was different across high and low help/support for divorce from former spouse's extended family ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 11.828, p < .00; \beta_{\text{high}} = -.307, p < .05; \beta_{\text{low}} = -.632, p < .001$). This finding suggests that, although more divorce stressors were still associated with poorer divorce adjustment, higher levels of support from former spouse's family lessened the negative impact of divorce-related stressors on overall divorce adjustment relative to low levels of support. Similarly, a significant chi-square change was observed for high and low supportive influence from one's own family for only one pathway (Figure 4): divorce-related stressors and problematic co-parenting ($\Delta\chi^2: 6.589, \Delta df: 1, p < .01; \beta_{\text{high}} = .215, p < .05; \beta_{\text{low}} = .481, p < .001$). All the other pathways for former spouse's help/support and one's own family's supportive influence as well as one's own family's help/support and former spouse's supportive influence did not significantly differ from the unconstrained model. Therefore, extended family support did not moderate these relationships.

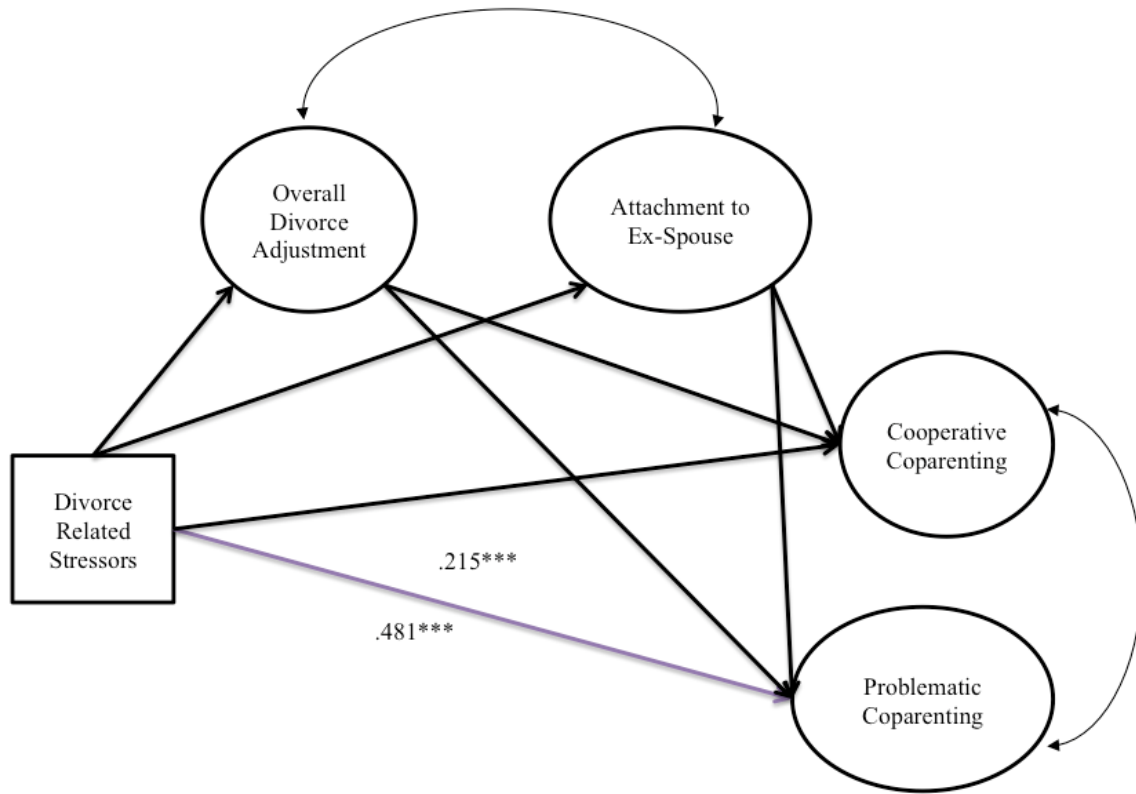


Figure 4: Multigroup difference (moderation) for one’s own extended family’s supportive influence toward former spouse on divorce-related stressors and problematic co-parenting

Note. The value above the line corresponds to value of higher support group and value below the line correspond to lower support group.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to explore the role of extended family support on post-divorce co-parenting. The Double ABCX Family Stress Model informed us about the complex associations between divorce-related stressors, perceptions of divorce, and post-divorce co-parenting. As hypothesized, pile-up stressors from the event of divorce negatively affected post-divorce co-parenting. People who experienced more stress with divorce had less cooperation and more conflict in their co-parenting relationship. In addition, the pile-up of experienced divorce-related stressors negatively impacted people’s meanings about the experiences of divorce as well

as their attachment to former spouses. People who experienced more stressors with divorce reported lower levels of adjustment to being a divorced person. In addition, people who experienced more stress reported more lingering attachment toward their spouses. These findings support the previous literature (Madden-Derdich et al., 1999; Wang & Amato, 2000).

The hypothesis for the relationship between perception of divorce and post-divorce co-parenting was not supported. In this study, we hypothesized that people who have more positive meanings around divorce experience and less lingering attachment to former spouses will have more cooperative and less conflictual co-parenting relationship. However, these relationships were not significant, except one. The relationship between attachment to former spouse and cooperative co-parenting was significant, but in the opposite direction than expected. Findings suggested that people who had lingering attachment to their former spouses, in fact, experienced higher levels of cooperation in their co-parenting relationship.

One possible explanation for this unexpected finding can be that when people differentiate from their former spouses, they tend to engage less with their former spouses. Conversely, people who maintain their attachment with their former spouses tend to engage in more interactions and cooperation with their former spouses. In fact, another study found a similar finding; Gürmen, Huff, and Brown (2015) found that divorced dyads' perceptions of co-parenting relationship were directly related to their perceptions of ongoing personal and emotional involvement with their former spouses. When people continued to have an ongoing personal and emotional relationship with their former spouses, they perceived their co-parenting relationship to have a higher quality (Gürmen et al., 2015). These findings emphasize the importance of understanding the continuity of families after divorce.

Another hypothesized association was the mediation effect of perception of divorce between divorce-related stressors and post-divorce co-parenting. We found that attachment to former spouse mediated the relationship between divorce-related stress and cooperation in post-divorce co-parenting. The impact of stressors from divorce on cooperative co-parenting was alleviated when people highly attached to their former spouses. In other words, ongoing attachment to former spouse might lessen the negative effects of divorce-related stressors on cooperative co-parenting. This also can be explained with Gürmen and her colleagues' findings (2015) and the discussion of "continuity of family". The degree of negative impact of divorce-related stressors on cooperation in co-parenting is mediated by people's ongoing relationship and attachment with their former spouses.

When we examined the moderating role of support from extended family, we found that extended family support acts as an important resource for families going through divorce and makes a positive contribution in some significant ways. First, one's own extended family' support for ongoing relationship between former spouses negatively affect the relationship between divorce-related stressors and problematic co-parenting. Receiving higher levels of support from one's own family to maintain an ongoing relationship with former spouse increased the impact of divorce-related stressors on problematic co-parenting. The effects of pile-up stress from divorce were intensified and resulted in more conflict in co-parental relationship for people who received lower levels of support and encouragement from their own extended family for their ongoing relationship and co-parenting with their former spouses. Similarly, support for overall divorce adjustment from former spouse's extended family helped individuals experience less negative effects of pile-up stress on their adjustment to divorce. These individuals compared

to those who received less support from their former spouse's extended family had less negative perceptions and meanings around the experience of divorce and being a divorced individual.

Results indicated that support from former spouse's family for overall divorce adjustment and support from one's own extended family for the ongoing relationship between former spouses were the only ones to make a unique contribution rather than own family support for divorce adjustment or former spouse's family for ongoing relationship. Findings from another study might help us to understand why these resources were more significant than others.

Gürmen, Anderson, and Brown (2015) looked at differences in the types of support that one's own extended family and former spouse's family provides. They found that extended family members from one's own family provide significantly more support for divorce adjustment than members from former spouse's family (Gürmen et al., 2015). In addition, post-divorce interactions such as contact, emotional closeness, and influence were significantly lower with former spouse's extended family than one's own family (Gürmen et al., 2015). Therefore, people's expectations regarding the former spouses' extended family might be lower in regards to the interactions and support that they will have following divorce. For divorced individuals who received higher levels of support from former spouses' family, therefore, might impacted the association between divorce-related stressors and perceptions of divorce more positively than who received lower levels of support.

In regards to supportive influence of extended family for ongoing relationship between former spouses, again, one's own family provides significantly more support than the former spouse's family (Gürmen et al., 2015). However, another important dimension might play a role in which the way the families provide support differently: their reactions to the decision of divorce. Gürmen and her colleagues (2015) found that if the extended family members from

one's own family reacted positively to the decision to divorce, they provide less support for ongoing relationship with former spouse. Although our study did not look at the reaction of extended family members to the decision to divorce, one can speculate that support from one's own family for the ongoing former spouse relationship might uniquely interact with the relationship between divorce-related stressors and post-divorce co-parenting. Another possible explanation might be that one's own family has overall more influence on divorced individuals' sense of identity, daily routines, and decision-making processes than the former spouse's extended family (Gürmen et al., 2015). Therefore, the support and encouragement from one's own family to maintain positive interactions with former spouse might have more influence on people's post-divorce interactions and co-parenting.

Limitations of the Current Study

The current study is a self-report study with divorced individuals reported their experiences of divorce and relationship with extended family retrospectively. Although the study looks at concepts that are systemic in nature such as post-divorce co-parenting, dyadic analyses cannot be employed due to mono-informant nature of the sample. In addition, this study was conducted as a cross-sectional online survey, which might limit the representativeness of the sample. Despite these limitations, it offers important insights into people's experiences of pile-up stressors related to divorce as well as how their resources and perceptions might affect their adaptation to divorce as co-parents.

The aim of the current study was to understand the extended family network's support for divorce-related experiences of individuals. However, there are other possible ways that extended family can affect nuclear family's experiences of divorce. Brown (1982) suggested that extended family members can sometimes negatively impact divorce adjustment and play a hindering role

for ongoing relationship between former spouses. The nature of this study and items and scales utilized for this study do not let us to look at the possible hindering effects the extended family can have. Future studies might include these aspects in order to expand our understanding of the role of extended family as resources people have during and after the experience of divorce.

Clinical Implications

Findings of the current study provide important insights for clinicians that work with divorced individuals and families. First of all, clinicians should be aware of the importance of extended family support on divorce adjustment and post-divorce co-parenting. In fact, the pioneers of family therapy field emphasize the importance of including extended family members in therapy sessions (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973; Minuchin & Fishman, 2009; Gurman, 1981a; 1981b). Our study provides empirical evidence on how extended family might play a protective role for family's divorce adaptations to divorce. Therefore, family therapists can assess for existing resources and help clients to utilize their extended family as a support network.

Another important insight this study provides is about the ongoing attachment and relationship between former spouses. The findings of the current study suggest that continuation of personal relationships might, in fact, help co-parents to cooperate with one another more so than having a differentiated, distant relationship. It might be important for clinicians to assess for ongoing personal and emotional involvement between former spouses and utilize this as a protective factor for cooperation in co-parenting relationship. However, the findings and implications of this study should be considered carefully given the limitations listed. Also, the current sample had moderate levels of stressors and an average of five years since divorce; hence the findings are not quite generalizable.

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The Influence and Involvement of Extended Family in Family Therapy:

Different Stages of Divorce

Abstract

Extended family relationships play an important role in the lives of nuclear families during different stages of divorce. Extended family members can provide support for post-divorce adjustment and relationships. They can also play a hindering role in relation to divorced individuals' ongoing relationship with their former spouses. Regardless of the role that they play, extended family members are usually actively involved in the lives of their divorcing/divorced relatives. The field of family therapy emphasizes and encourages the inclusion of extended family members in therapy sessions. Despite the importance of extended family, there is no empirical study exploring its involvement in family therapy sessions. The current study attempted to fill this gap by exploring the direct and indirect involvement of extended family members on family therapy during different stages of divorce. The sample was composed of 117 divorced men and women (31% male and 69% female) who went to therapy with their former spouse at different stages of divorce. Participants were asked to report on the extent their extended family members discuss about conjoint therapy as well as the extent that they discussed extended family in therapy sessions. Results revealed that the indirect involvement of extended family members in family therapy sessions is low. Moreover, the majority of divorced individuals expressed opposition to including or discussing extended family members in their conjoint session with former spouses.

The Influence and Involvement of Extended Family in Family Therapy:

Different Stages of Divorce

Extended family relationships play an important role in the life of families throughout the family life cycle (Carter & McGoldrick, 2005). From forming a new family to having the first child, from launching children to later life in families, extended family members affect and are affected by the stress experienced in families in varying degrees (Carter & McGoldrick, 2005). In addition, alternative family life trajectories such as divorce and remarriage are stressful times for family members that require reorganization of the entire family system (Brown, 1982; Pattison, DeFrancisco, Wood, Frazier, & Crowder, 1975; Wilson, 1986). Extended kinship relationships are particularly important during such times (Dressler, 1985; Lin, Ensel, Simeone, & Kuo, 1979; Macklin & Rubin, 1983). Despite the importance of extended family relationships during the divorce process there are no studies within the field of family therapy that examine the role extended family may play in the therapy process during this transition. The purpose of this study is to describe the involvement and influence of extended family members in conjoint therapy of divorced individuals.

Extended Family Relationships and Divorce

Divorce is a transition period for families during which they undergo several adjustments and reorganizations of relationships, family tasks, and customs (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011). Relationships with extended family members are also affected by this reorganization of family structure. For instance, findings from several past studies suggest that contact and emotional closeness with extended family, especially, relatives by marriage, experience a decrease immediately following divorce (Ambert, 1988; Anspach, 1976; Spicer & Hampe, 1975).

A recent study explored contemporary post-divorce relationships with extended family (Gürmen, Anderson, & Brown, 2015). The authors found that divorced individuals experience change in contact, emotional closeness, and perceived influence of extended family members following divorce. The direction of the change, however, varied based on whether the extended family members were from one's own family, which led to increases, or from one's former spouse, which led to decreases. These differences held true for both women and men. In addition, gender plays a significant role for post-divorce interactions, mainly for post-divorce contact and perceived influence (Gürmen et al., 2015).

Despite the changes experienced in post-divorce relationships, extended family is considered one of the most important social support networks for individuals and families going through divorce and separation (Lin et al., 1979). Extended family can offer instrumental support such as home repairs, childcare, or financial aid during and after divorce (Serovich, Price, & Chapman, 1991; Wilson, 1986). Moreover, extended family can provide emotional support and advice to divorcing individuals (Serovich et al., 1991). The extended family may also help buffer against the potential negative impacts of divorce and separation on family members (Brown, 1982, Lin et al., 1979).

In addition to emotional and instrumental support for divorce adjustment, extended family members can provide support for the ongoing relationship between former spouses and encourage effective co-parenting (Gürmen et al., 2015). Similar to support for overall divorce adjustment, divorced individuals experience significantly more support and encouragement from their own extended family than from their former spouse's family (Gürmen et al., 2015). Gender seems to play an interesting role here. Men, compared to women, receive more support and encouragement from their own extended family to have a positive ongoing relationship with their

former spouses (Gürmen et al., 2015).

While extended family can serve as an important social support for divorced individuals, it can also hinder the divorce adjustment and ongoing relationship between former spouses (Brown, 1982; Hamon, 1995). For example, if the members of the extended family feel very negatively towards soon to be ex-partner, they might provide hindering messages and meanings about the partner, which can impede the post-divorce interactions between former spouses (Brown, 1982). In addition, the extended family's approval of the decision to divorce might affect the level of support they provide (Macklin & Rubin, 1983; Serovich et al., 1991). If extended family reacted positively to the decision to divorce, they are significantly more likely to provide support for overall divorce adjustment to their divorced relatives (Gürmen et al., 2015). In relation to support for the ongoing relationship between former spouses, research has found that if one's own extended family reacted positively to decision to divorce, they are less inclined to provide support to maintain an ongoing relationship with former spouse (Gürmen et al., 2015). This, in turn, might affect post-divorce adjustment and post-divorce co-parenting between former spouses in a negative way (Gürmen, Anderson, & Adamsons, 2015).

Extended Family Relationships and Family Therapy

One of the core assumptions of the Family Therapy field is the systemic understanding or systems theory, which is the idea that all members of the system are interdependent and they can both affect and be affected by the system (Minuchin, 1974; Minuchin & Fishman, 2009). Family as a system has individual nuclear family members, subsystems, and also surrounding external systems such as extended family network (Minuchin, 1974; Minuchin & Fishman, 2009). In the family therapy field, extended family relationships are examined and included in different ways that include but are not limited to explorations of the family-of-origin and understanding

multigenerational patterns (McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985) and examination of current dynamics and relationships of extended family and mobilizing them as resources (Rueveni, 1979).

Although the importance of extended family relationships is emphasized in family therapy theory, in practice, therapists tend to focus primarily on the nuclear family (Pattison et.al, 1975). Therefore, pioneers in the family therapy field continuously called for therapists to directly include extended family members in therapy sessions (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973; Minuchin & Fishman, 2009; Gurman, 1981a; 1981b). Especially, in the face of stressful life events or mental health issues, extended family becomes an important source of support and a network to build for intervention (Rueveni, 1979). It is the role of the therapist to initiate discussions around current extended family relationships, to explore intergenerational patterns, utilize the potential supportive networks for the families in crises (Rueveni, 1979, Pattison et al., 1975). Intergenerational therapists have suggested inviting some influential extended family members, such as grandparents, to family therapy sessions in order to engage in different levels of systemic exchanges (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973; Rueveni, 1979). Despite the emphasis on inclusion of extended family in family therapy, to date, there is no empirical study regarding this topic.

Family Therapy, Divorce, and Extended Family Relationships

Family therapy is an important avenue for divorcing/divorced individuals to seek help with adjusting to the many changes that occur during and after a divorce (Kruk, 1993; Visher & Visher, 1989). When children are present in a family, there is also a need for parents to find a non-conflictual interaction pattern in order to co-parent effectively (Neff & Cooper, 2004). Individuals in the face of different phases of divorce and separation seem to benefit from conjoint therapy with their former partner (Kaslow, 1995). Because it is a stressful time for

family members, conjoint therapy provides a safe space for former partners to experience and express their emotions and find different coping strategies for changes that they are experiencing. Even though therapeutic approaches and focus of discussions seem to differ in different stages of divorce (before, during, and after divorce), conjoint family therapy is found to be successful in all of the stages (Kaslow, 1995). Family therapy can also be helpful for divorcing/divorced co-parents to alleviate conflict and find adaptive ways to cooperatively co-parent their children after divorce (Neff & Cooper, 2004).

Despite the importance of the extended family in the divorce process and the frequent use of family therapy as a treatment for both divorce adjustment and co-parenting conflict, not much is known about the importance and involvement of extended family in divorce therapy. Currently, we can only speculate that extended family members might have a more direct influence in the therapy process by participating in or being directly discussed in sessions. Additionally, they might affect the therapy process by giving supportive or hindering messages to their divorced children in regards to therapy process, which can be considered as their indirect involvement. However, these speculations about involvement of extended family members in conjoint divorce therapy are yet to be explored by family therapy researchers. Therefore, in the current paper, we were interested in exploring indirect influences and involvement of extended family members with therapy with their former spouses as well as what happens in the therapy room in relation to discussions or inclusions of extended family relationships.

The Current Study

In order to find empirical answers to the speculations listed above, we conducted a study with divorced individuals with the following research questions.

- 1- How are extended family members indirectly involved in former spouses' family

therapy experiences?

2- To what extent are extended family relationships discussed in divorce-related family therapy?

Although, this study is exploratory in nature, deriving from the existing literature described in earlier sections, we expect to see differences in extended family relationships between one's own family and their former spouse's family. Also, given the different levels of post-divorce influence of extended family members for men and women (Gürmen et al., 2015), we expect that gender might be influential in the indirect involvement of extended family members in family therapy. Lastly, given the different needs and processes of therapy during and after divorce, we expect to see differences in extended family involvement in therapy before and after divorce.

Methods

Participants

Participants in this study were drawn from a larger study of extended family relationships during divorce. The current sample is composed of 117 divorced men and women (31% male and 69% female) from the larger study who reported that they went to therapy with their former spouse. The majority of participants ($n = 87$; 74%) reported that they went to therapy before divorce. The mean age was 37.8 ($SD = 9.7$) years with a range from 19 to 67. Seventy-five percent of the sample reported their ethnicity as being White/Caucasian. Twelve percent identified as African American, about 7% as Hispanic, 3% as Asian, 1% as Native American, and 2% identified themselves as multiracial. Additionally, more than 98% of the sample have at least a high school diploma and almost half of the sample reported having at least a bachelor's degree. The annual income level was below \$20,000 for 10% of the sample and above \$90,000 for 6% of the sample. The median reported income was in \$40,000 - \$49,000 range.

Participants reported being divorced for an average of 4.9 years ($SD = 4.44$). Sixty-percent of the sample reported having joint custody of their children, with 31% reporting that they have sole custody and 9% reporting that their former spouse has the sole custody. More than half of the sample reported being awarded child support by the court and 24% of the sample were ordered by the court to pay the child support.

Measures

Demographic variables. Demographic variables about the participants included age, gender, ethnicity, income, and education.

Therapy process. Five individual items explored the indirect involvement of family members in family therapy. These included items that examined the conversations that participants might have with their extended family outside of therapy about the therapy process as well as the supportive influence that extended family might have on participants' relationship to their former spouses in therapy. Sample items included "I discuss what happens in therapy with my own extended family/my former spouses' family", "My own extended family supports me continuing therapy with my former spouse".

There were also four questions that assessed the extent to which extended family members are directly discussed in couples or co-parenting therapy with former spouses. The questions asked about the involvement of extended family members in the therapy room through discussions in sessions. Sample items included "I talk about my extended family members in therapy with my former spouse", "My therapist brings up issues around my relationship with my own/former spouses' extended family in therapy" Lastly, participants were asked if they would prefer to have their extended family members involved in therapy either directly by attending sessions or indirectly by having more discussions around extended family members with their

former spouses in the therapy room. Sample items included “Would you like to bring up issues around extended family members in your therapy with your former spouse?” and “Would you like members of your extended family to attend some sessions with you in your therapy with your former spouse?”. All of the items were rated on 5-point Likert-type scales from never/definitely not (1) to very often/definitely yes (5).

Procedures

The current sample was drawn from a larger study that explored the role of extended family relationships among divorced individuals. The data was collected as an online survey study using Qualtrics.com, recruiting participants through Mechanical Turk (MTurk). MTurk is an online market hosted by Amazon.com. It is a platform where you can post surveys for respondents to complete for a specific rate. MTurk, as a platform to collect data for social and behavioral science research, has been empirically supported to produce reliable and valid datasets, comparable to other recruitment strategies through Social Media or face-to-face (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Casler, Bickel, & Hackett, 2013). In fact, samples recruited from MTurk are found to be more diverse in terms of socioeconomic status and ethnicity than samples recruited from other platforms (Buhrmester et al. 2011; Casler et al., 2013).

For the purposes of the current study, only former spouses who have biological and/or adopted children together were included. Additional restrictions to the sample included access to the Internet and English fluency, as the study was conducted as an online survey with measures and items in English. The survey took about 15 minutes to fill out. Participants received \$0.40 for completing the questionnaire.

Results

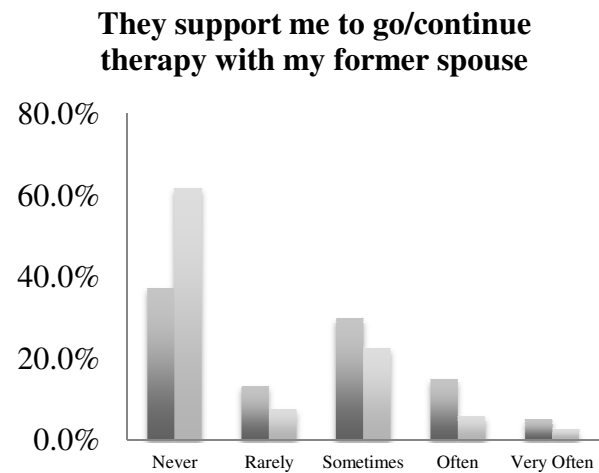
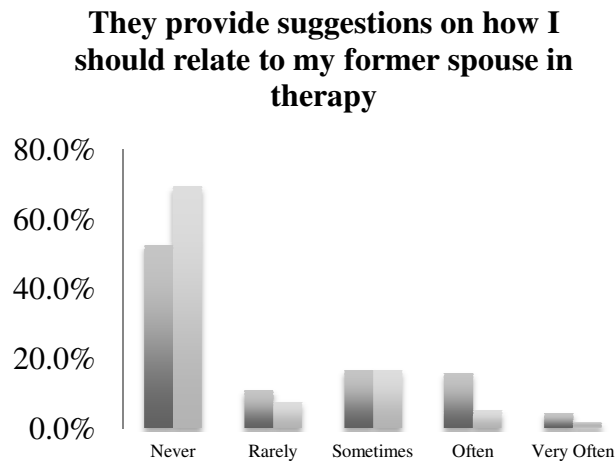
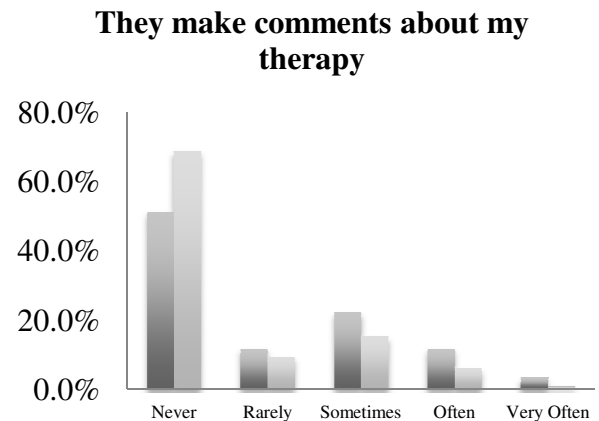
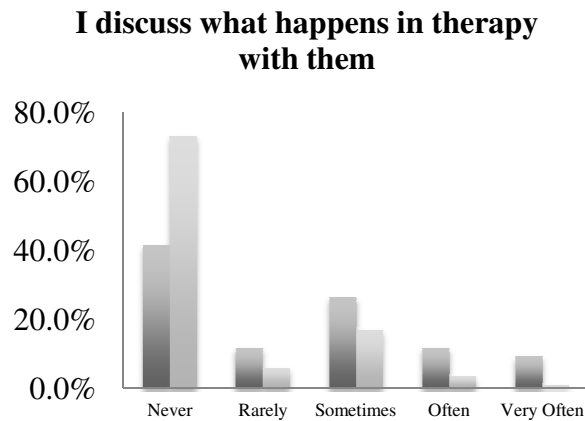
Data Analyzing Strategies

In order to explore the role of extended family members in therapy with divorced individuals, we conducted mostly descriptive analyses for each item. In addition, we conducted paired samples t-test analyses in order to test if there were differences between the involvement of extended family members from participants' own families and their former spouses' families. We also looked at the role of gender in relation to extended family's involvement in therapy of divorced individuals by utilizing an independent samples t-test. Furthermore, we explored possible differences between people who reported that they went to therapy with their former spouses at different stages of divorce.

Findings

Indirect Involvement of Extended Family in Therapy. Figure 1 shows a summary of percentages of participants' responses to indirect involvement of extended family related items. Participants were first asked to report to what extent they discuss what happens in couples or co-parenting therapy with their extended family members. More than half of the sample reported that they *never to rarely* discuss what happens in their couples therapy with their former spouse with the members of their own family. The percentage is higher for extended family members from the former spouses family; 81% of the sample reported that they *never to rarely* discuss what happens in their therapy with the members of the former spouses' family. A similar trend was found to be true for the item "My own/former spouse's family makes comments about my therapy with my former spouse." Fifty-two percent of the sample reported that their own extended family members *never* make comments about their therapy while 70% of the sample stated that their former spouses' family *never* makes comments about their therapy. They also reported on how often their extended family members provide suggestions for how participants

should relate to their former spouse in therapy context. Seventeen percent of the sample reported that members from their own family *often to very often* provide suggestions while only 6% reported that members of the former spouses' family do.



They encourage me to continue to therapy with my former spouse.

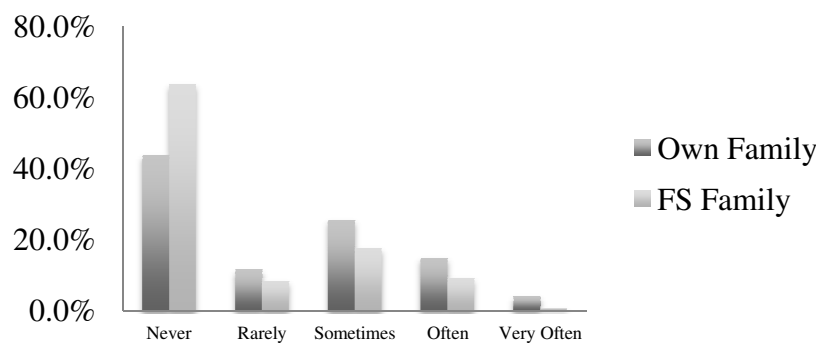


Figure 1: Indirect involvement of extended family to family therapy between former spouses

The other two items ask about the level of support and encouragement that the members of the extended family provided to divorced individuals regarding the continuation of their therapy with their former spouses. Thirty-eight percent of the sample reported that the members of their own family *never* supported the participants continuing therapy with their former spouses, while 45% of the sample reported they were *never* encouraged to continue to therapy with their former spouses. The members from the former spouses' family were even less supportive or encouraging. Sixty-four percent of the sample reported that they were *never* supported and 66% of the sample reported they were *never* encouraged to continue therapy with their former spouse by the members from their former spouses' family.

In order to examine the possible differences between indirect involvement of their own extended family and their former spouses' family, paired samples t-test analyses were conducted. Table 1 summarizes the findings of the paired samples t-test analyses. Results revealed that these differences are significant between members of the two families for all items. Participants' own extended family members had significantly more indirect involvement in their couples (co-parenting) therapy than did members of the former spouse's family.

Table 1.

Indirect Involvement of Extended Family in Therapy (N = 110).

	<i>Your Own</i>		<i>Former Spouses'</i>		
	<i>Family</i>		<i>Family</i>		
<i>Variables</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>
I discuss what happens in therapy with my extended family	2.23	1.31	1.46	.91	6.741***
<i>My extended family</i>					
makes comments about my therapy with my former spouse	1.99	1.20	1.55	.95	3.916***
provides suggestions on how I should relate to my former spouse in therapy	1.98	1.26	1.55	1.01	3.317***
supports me to go/continue therapy with my former spouse	2.36	1.27	1.75	1.12	5.174***
encourages me to continue therapy with my former spouse	2.19	1.27	1.67	1.05	4.641***

*** $p < .001$

We also explored the role of gender for each item. Independent t-test analyses with gender (see Table 2) revealed that there are significant gender differences in almost all of the items. Men, compared to women, received more indirect involvement from their extended family members regarding their therapy with their former wives.

Table 2.

Gender Differences in Indirect Involvement of Extended Family in Therapy (N = 110).

	<i>Males</i>		<i>Females</i>		
<i>Variables</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>
<i>My own extended family</i>					
I discuss what happens in therapy	2.62	1.13	2.05	1.36	2.122*
makes comments about my therapy	2.41	1.21	1.80	1.16	2.520*
provides suggestions on how I					
should relate to my former	2.47	1.35	1.76	1.15	2.648*
spouse					
supports me to go/continue therapy	2.68	1.22	2.21	1.28	1.385
encourages me to continue therapy	2.71	1.36	1.96	1.16	2.950**
<i>My former spouses' extended family</i>					
I discuss what happens in therapy	1.79	1.15	1.32	.75	2.224*
makes comments about my therapy	1.88	1.09	1.39	.85	2.306*
provides suggestions on how I					
should relate to my former	1.91	1.26	1.39	.83	2.182*
spouse					
supports me to go/continue therapy	1.91	1.19	1.67	1.09	1.042
encourages me to continue therapy	2.00	1.16	1.53	.97	2.225*

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

We wanted to look at possible differences between participants who went to therapy before the divorce and those who went to therapy in later stages of divorce (during or after). Independent samples t-test analyses revealed that there were significant differences between two groups only for the items about support and encouragement from their own extended family members. It appears that participants' own extended family members provided significantly more support ($M_{beforedivorce} = 2.57$, $M_{duringafterdivorce} = 1.71$, $t(108) = 3.206$, $p < .01$) and more encouragement ($M_{beforedivorce} = 2.38$, $M_{duringafterdivorce} = 1.64$, $t(108) = 3.117$, $p < .01$) for participants to continue to therapy before divorce, compared to those who went during and after divorce. Similarly, participants' former spouses' extended family members provided significantly more support ($M_{beforedivorce} = 1.88$, $M_{duringafterdivorce} = 1.36$, $t(108) = 2.720$, $p < .01$) and more encouragement ($M_{beforedivorce} = 1.78$, $M_{duringafterdivorce} = 1.36$, $t(108) = 2.363$, $p < .05$) for participants to continue to therapy before divorce than they did to those who pursued therapy during or after the divorce.

Extended Family as Focus of Discussion in Therapy. Participants' responses to items about inclusion of extended family through discussions are presented in Figure 2. Participants were asked to report on how often they talk about their extended family members in therapy. Twenty-eight percent of the sample reported that they *never* talked about their extended family members in therapy and more than half of the sample reported that they *sometimes to very often* talked about their extended family members in couples (co-parenting) therapy. While a large number of therapists *never* discussed extended family relationships in therapy (30%), it appears that the extended family was brought up at least *sometimes to very often* by the therapist (50% own family, 55% former spouse's family).

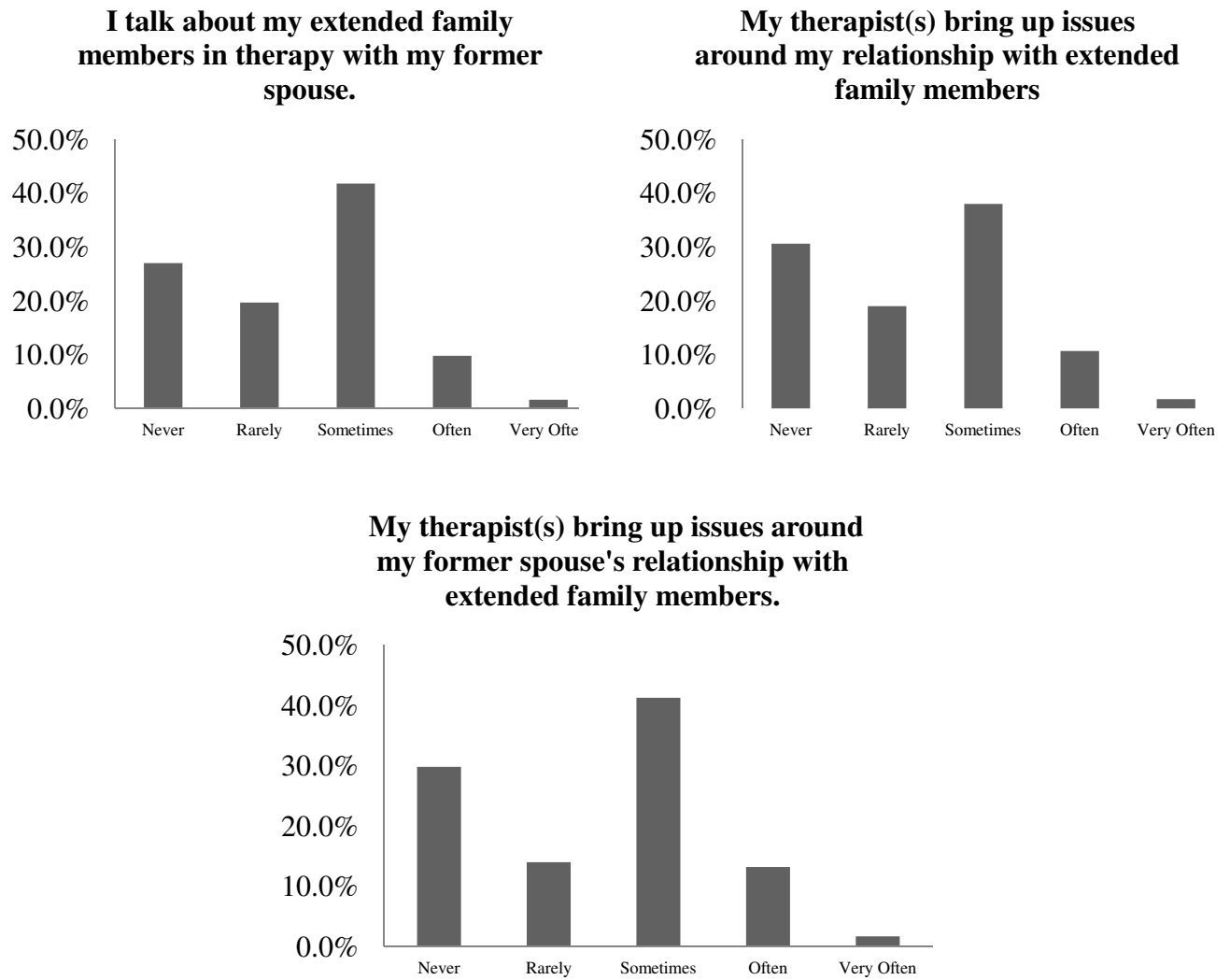


Figure 2: Extended family as focus of discussion in therapy

In terms of gender, there appeared to be no significant differences for each item related to discussion of extended family members in therapy. However, there were significant differences with regards to the phase during which the participants went to therapy. Participants who went to therapy before divorce discussed their extended family members in therapy significantly more than participants who went to therapy during or after divorce ($M_{beforedivorce} = 2.56$; $M_{duringafterdivorce} = 1.70$, $t(112) = 4.214$, $p < .001$). This is also true for therapists' bringing up issues about extended family members in therapy. Therapists brought up issues around participants' own extended family members before divorce ($M_{beforedivorce} = 2.55$) significantly more than during or after divorce ($M_{duringafterdivorce} = 1.67$, $t(112) = 4.010$, $p < .001$). Similarly, therapists brought up issues around participants' former spouses' extended family members before divorce ($M_{beforedivorce} = 2.66$) significantly more than during or after divorce ($M_{duringafterdivorce} = 1.67$, $t(112) = 4.418$, $p < .001$).

Lastly, divorced individuals were asked to report their preferences around discussing their extended family members in therapy with their former spouse. The majority of the sample (75%) did not want to talk about issues around extended family members in therapy with their former spouse. They were also asked whether or not they wanted their extended family members to attend sessions with them in therapy with their former spouses. Similarly, a majority of the participants reported that they did not want their extended family members to attend sessions with them (83% for their own extended family, 78% for their former spouses' family). Gender did not have a significant contribution for any of these items. Additionally, there were no significant differences for these items between participants who went to therapy at different stages of divorce.

Discussion

Findings suggest that not many divorcing/divorced individuals discuss what happens in their conjoint therapy with their extended family members. In addition, extended family members do not necessarily ask about or make comments about the therapy experiences of their divorcing/divorced relatives. In terms of support and encouragement for divorced individuals to go to therapy with their former spouses, we see higher percentages of extended family members' involvement but still, on average, extended family is rarely directly or indirectly involved in the family therapy of their divorcing/divorced relatives.

When we look at the difference between one's own extended family and the former spouse's family, it appears that one's own family is significantly more involved than the former spouse's family. This finding is not surprising given decreases in contact and emotional closeness are more drastic with relatives by marriage (Ambert, 1988; Anspach, 1976; Gürmen et al., 2015; Spicer & Hampe, 1975). In fact, we know that the contact, closeness, and influence of extended family from one's own side might change in the positive direction after divorce (Gürmen et al., 2015). Alternatively, the former spouses' family might be involved but provide hindering or negative messages regarding conjoint therapy with the former spouse. As the items in the current study were all positively worded (support, encourage, etc.), we cannot make any conclusions regarding the possible negative involvement of relatives by marriage with the therapy experiences of divorced individuals.

Findings also suggest significant differences in extended families' support and encouragement of therapy at different stages of divorce. These differences were expected given the different therapeutic approaches and focus of discussions that family therapy employs at different stages of divorce (Kaslow, 1995). In addition, research suggests that divorcing

individuals are more likely to discuss their issues with and ask for advice from extended family members in the pre-divorce stage (Kaslow, 1995). Also, it can be speculated that before divorce, extended family might have some hope for the divorcing couple to solve their problems in family therapy and avoid divorce; hence, they might be more likely to engage in conversations about divorcing relatives' therapy sessions.

When we look at the extended family relationships as a focus of discussion in family therapy, more than half of the sample reported talking about extended family in sessions, but 70% of the sample reported that they do not want to talk about their extended family in sessions with their former spouse. This finding is puzzling as to why people hesitate to bring up issues around extended family relationships in family therapy. It is also interesting that this trend did not differ according to family therapy in different stages of divorce. Divorcing and divorced individuals did not want to discuss extended family relationships in family therapy. Although, nature of this study does not allow any potential answers, we can speculate that divorced individuals wanted to keep the focus on the nuclear family relationships. In fact, Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973) discussed about an unconscious resistance of family members to talk about intergenerational patterns and extended family relationships in order to keep the focus on the identified problem (usually a nuclear family member) and avoid systemic explorations and interventions.

When we look at the role of gender, there were some significant differences in relation to indirect involvement of extended family in therapy. Men, compared with women, reported more indirect involvement from their own extended family in relation to their therapy sessions with their former wives. Although, we do not know the underlying reasons for this difference, one study by Fletcher and StGeorge (2010) might provide some insight. In their study, they explored

the men's help-seeking behaviors in the face of family dissolution (Fletcher & StGeorge, 2010). They found that when men experience distress during family dissolution, they are more likely to seek emotional support and advice from families and friends, rather than other professional resources (Fletcher & StGeorge, 2010). They discussed that this could be partly due to a lack of professional resources such as help-lines or agencies available to men going through separation or divorce (Fletcher & StGeorge, 2010). Although this is remotely related to research findings here, there is a possibility for men to seek and receive involvement from extended family members in relation to their therapy process with their former wives.

Limitations and Future Research

Overall, findings of the current study suggest that there is a discrepancy between theory and practice in the family therapy with divorced individuals. Even though extended family can play important roles (supporting or hindering) in relation to the divorce-related experiences of nuclear families, they are not very much involved in conjoint therapy of former spouses. Also, there seem to be differences in worldviews of family therapists and family members in relation to extended family's involvement in therapy sessions. It appears that more than half of the therapists are bringing up issues related to extended family members in therapy, but clients do not want to talk about them. There seem to be other unknown factors playing into this discrepancy that future research should further explore.

There are very important questions that can be raised based on the findings of the current study. Considering the call of pioneers of the family therapy field to include extended family, should a therapist bring up issues related to extended family in conjoint sessions of divorced individuals? Or given that the majority of the clients do not want to talk about extended family, should the therapist leave it out of the therapy room? Future studies should explore this disparity

and further understand the best therapy practices regarding extended family involvement in family therapy.

Due to its quantitative, mono-informant nature, the present study does not allow us to understand other unknown factors that might play into the difference in worldviews of therapists and clients. Future studies with thorough qualitative interviews might explore the experiences of divorcing/divorced individuals in relation to their therapy experiences and extended family relationships. These studies can explore divorced individuals' reasons for not wanting to talk about extended family or the desire to keep extended family members out of therapy sessions. Studies also can further explore the differing levels of extended family involvement at different stages of divorce to empirically respond to our speculations stated above. In addition, future studies should explore the extended family members' perceptions and meanings of family therapy to understand the reasoning behind their supportive or hindering influence in therapy.

Despite its limitations, current study is the first empirical study that empirically examined the influence and involvement of extended family in conjoint family therapy of former spouses. Given the theorized importance of utilizing extended family members as information or mobilizing them as sources of support for family members, family therapy researchers should explore the role of extended family in therapy more in detail. The current study provides an empirical foundation and several questions for future studies to continue to shed light on this important matter.

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